SHORT STORIES

No. 778.] Week ending November 28, 1903. [Price One Penny.

Sara snatched the key and grappled with the servant, whilst the poor girl who was doomed to die made her escape.

(An Exciting Incident from this week's "The Pursuit of Sara." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 778.] Week Ending November 28th, 1903. [One Penny.

Fascinating New Series. Start To-day.

THE PURSUIT OF SARA

The names of persons mentioned in this series are not necessarily the correct ones.

For New Readers.

Miss Sara Gillespie, the relater of these experiences, was a typine in the firm of Templeton & Co.

The partners in the firm were Mr. Templeton, Mr. Harrington Shackell, and Mr. Rigby Starr. The first-named before very long induced her to tell him all about her absent lover, Noel Masterman.

Noel was the nephew of Sir Francis Masterman, who in his will left him a thousand pounds. With this money he intended to buy a doctor's practice, and to give up the situation he was holding, that of medical attendant to a gentleman who was travelling on the Continent.

He came home to England on the death of the Baronet, but was soon recalled by telegram to Nice, as his patient had shown bad symptoms.

Noel was, however, loth to give up the idea of purchasing the practice he had in view, so, leaving the thousand pounds with them in notes, he signed a document authorising Templeton & Co. to act for him.

By a piece of trickery the firm converted this into a document authorising them to deal *with his whole estate.* He was heir to the Baronetcy, in the event of the present holder of the title, Sir Herbert, his cousin, having no son.

The next day Sara overheard the three partners gloating over the probable success of their schemes, and she was amazed and horrified to hear Shackell relate how, posing as Sir Herbert's valet, he had murdered the Baronet in cold blood.

Her betrothed was now Sir Noel Masterman, and Templeton & Co. had full power over his estate!

She resolved on a bold scheme—to get possession of the notes and the document. Bursting into the room, she eluded her astounded employers, seized the precious papers, and fled.

Besides the £1,000 in notes, she had about five pounds with her. Sara wired to Noel to return at once, and she then took train to Bedford.

While there a murderous attack was made on her by Rigby Starr, disguised as a nurse. He endeavoured to push Sara into the river by Newnham Bridge, but Sara escaped, and, still retaining the all-important paper relating to her lover's inheritance, made her way to Northampton.

Templeton & Co., she knew, would leave no stone unturned to find her; no course would be too desperate for them to take in order to regain the document.

At Northampton Sara rescued a little boy from death, and thereby gained the devoted friendship of a young girl named Maggie Dunkley. To her she confided all her troubles.

In this town, Sara was led to believe that Noel was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In disguise, Harrington Shackell enticed Sara to the racecourse, saying that he would rescue Noel for her.

Sara went, as invited, and another desperate attempt was then made by the firm to recover the papers.

They were, however, outwitted, and Miss Gillespie fled to Leicester. Here she met Sidney Ilford, an agent of the firm, who informed Sara that a reward of £100 was offered for her arrest.

She just managed to run away from him.

Her only plan was to disguise herself so as to escape recognition, and this she managed successfully to do.

She received a telegram from Maggie Dunkley, telling her that Noel would be with her the following day.

Overcome with joy, Miss Gillespie went to the appointed meeting-place—the canal.

She was secured on board a barge by Sidney Ilford, and when Noel presently came to seek her, Ilford was enabled to conceal Sara, and much to her chagrin Noel left.

Sara made a dash for liberty and reached Birmingham. At New Street Station a heavy parcel fell on her foot, hurting her ankle.

The owner of the parcel, Mrs. Moran, offered to take her home and tend to her injury, and Sara accepted her hospitality.

While in this house Sara received vague warnings which she was at a loss to understand, till one evening she saw, through a fanlight, what she took to be *the face of a dead woman.*

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THE TERROR AT BIRMINGHAM.

THE emotion of horror dominated me. Fear came to me and trembling; my flesh shivered, my heart seemed turned to ice. The face, livid in colour, was not emaciated; as I looked I saw the lips, blue-stained lips, twitch over the teeth. The eyes, glassy and staring, were of a sudden galvanised to life. The fanlight, that, working on a hinge, opened into the room in which I sat, was gently pushed an inch or two. The catch that held it shut, had been left unfastened, so that it swung softly back.

Through the aperture a hand and arm appeared, and something white was dropped on the floor; and then the face vanished, the fanlight closed, the light went out, and I, alone in the darkness, was left to solve the meaning of the mystery.

Through the night I sat, cowering in the chair, my eyes turned, now towards the fanlight, now towards the floor. It was too dark to distinguish what it was that my ghastly visitant had dropped. The electric light was still refractory and the dawn was distant by some hours. I could not summon to my aid sufficient resolution to leave my chair, my ankle throbbed, my body ached, and yet I had not courage enough to go to bed.

Perhaps in my sleep that ghastly face would look at me, those thin, claw-like fingers point at me!

Who and what was this thing? The face was a dead face, and yet—could it be that some person, woman it might be, had put on a mask to frighten me?

No, no mask could alter in expression as the face had done. Could it be—sinister recollections stole across my mind; strange tales of men who had kept their victims under lock and key, administering to them some slow and subtle poison. The memory of a picture that I had once seen came back to me. A girl with wizened form, and death-like countenance. I had been told it was the study of a girl poisoned by lead.

"*It will be the same with you as with the others!*" Mrs. Moran's words came back to me at this moment. Perhaps "one of the others" was in the room next to mine, suffering agony, or—the thought chilled me again to horror—*dead*.

If only the day would come; so slow, so dark were the hours. Never had the torch of morning tarried so long to light the East. I tried to force my thoughts to other things, for fear of the dread that weighed on me. I strove to recall fragments of verse, to evoke some kindly image of security.

At length the blackness of night gave place to the grey of a quiet dawning. I watched till the light stealing between the curtains at the window touched the edge of the carpet; then waited breathless while it crept by slow and sure degrees across the room. Now it was even with the couch, another minute it would reach the table, now, with a cry, I stretched out my hand. The light had fallen on a letter lying on the floor.

The distance from my chair to where the letter lay was but the matter of a yard or so. I dragged myself towards the spot and clutched it eagerly. Scrawled in pencil, on a half sheet of paper, was the following:

"I am kept here against my will by my uncle, who desires my death. Will you help me to escape? Say nothing to anyone, but if you will help me knock three times on the wall—under the fanlight.

It was a woman's writing, and showed signs of great agitation

I managed to reach the wall, and gave three distinct raps on the panels; a minute or two elapsed, and then three fainter raps assured me that the message had been understood.

It remained for the occupant of the other room to reopen communication. It did not seem as if her life were in immediate danger, otherwise her appeal would have been even more strongly worded. I decided I could do nothing until the morning. By that time, if I could snatch a few hours' rest, I should be better able to judge the situation. The terrors of the night had left me utterly worn out, and I fell into a sleep sound as a child's.

I did not get up till late the following afternoon. My ankle was less swollen. I was able to walk a few steps without much pain.

Mrs. Moran waited on me herself. I saw neither Rachel the grim, nor Janet the frivolous.

"I hope you had a good night, my dear," she asked kindly. "My husband's niece sleeps in the next room. She's ill, poor thing, and inclined to be restless. Did she disturb you at all?"

"Not in the least," I answered, ready and unashamed. "What is the matter with her, Mrs. Moran?"

"The doctor says it is blood poisoning, my dear; but I think she's in a decline. All her family are consumptive; a pretty girl she used to be, and full of fun. It's sad to see how terribly she's altered."

"Has she lived with you long?"

"She came to us two years ago, when her father died. Truscot was left her guardian. He was very fond of her, and is so now, for that matter, though she's taken a turn against him. She and Arthur Merridew, the young fellow I pointed out to you, took up with one another. I like Arthur myself, but he was nothing of a match for Lesbia. My husband opposed their engagement, and discharged Arthur from his employment. That was in January—nine months back. Lesbia took it to heart terribly, and has pined away ever since."

"How old is she?" I asked.

"Twenty-one next month—if she lives till then she'll be her own mistress, and can marry whom she likes. But——" Mrs. Moran sighed, and dropped her hands helplessly beside her.

My pity and my curiosity were roused to the highest pitch by this statement. I longed for the evening, when the unfortunate Lesbia would perhaps give me her account of the story. Meanwhile, anxiety on my own account had not lessened. I had hoped Maggie would wire to me on receipt of my letter; as the hours went on without bringing the expected telegram, I began to speculate upon the chance of Noel answering my appeal in person.

Every knock at the door set my heart in a flutter; it might be that my lover himself had come.

By half-past nine I had worked myself up to a terrible pitch of excitement. I felt I could not bear another hour of suspense. Just as I had made up my mind to quit my room and gain the hall—preparatory to going out—Mrs. Moran hastily appeared.

"Here!" She struggled for breath, and thrust a letter in my hand. I slipped it in my bodice—none too quickly, as things happened. A step sounded outside my door. Truscot Moran's voice asked in mellow tones if I were better.

"Much better, thank you; almost well," I answered. "Mrs. Moran has been so good to me."

"I—I just brought up some grapes," she faltered. "Miss Gillespie said she had a fancy for them," and the poor thing pushed a plate of fruit towards me.

"Quite so. Did I hear the postman just now, Mary?"

"Yes, it was a letter for me," she answered, "a bill, I should say," and she handed him the missive deferentially.

He accepted the statement, though I do not think that for a moment he believed it. Together they went downstairs, wishing me "Good night." Barely had the echo of their steps died away before I locked the door and opened eagerly my letter.

It was from Maggie, and contained bad news. She wrote

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coldly, almost angrily. Briefly she stated that, owing to my rashness, everything had gone wrong. Had I waited at Mrs. Goodman's I should have met my lover, and my troubles would have ended. As it was, not only had I been tricked by Templeton and Co., but, as she feared, Noel also. He had received a message purporting to come from me, addressed from a house on the outskirts of Leicester.

Without waiting to consult Jim and Maggie, who were still searching for me by the canal, he started off, leaving the note with Mrs. Goodman. On their return, finding him absent, my friends, suspecting mischief, set off for the address mentioned. No such street or house existed! It was evident that Noel had fallen into a trap; at the present moment he was perhaps in the hands of the firm.

Not wishing to act on her own responsibility, Maggie wrote to me for instructions. Should she go to the police and tell them of Noel's disappearance, or, should nothing be done in the matter?

The news maddened me, my own position—alone in a strange house, surrounded by mystery and peril—faded into insignificance beside the thought that harm had come to Noel.

I would wire to the Dunkleys that night, and tell them at all cost to go to the police; alas! even as I hurried impetuously to the door, the insuperable obstacle of my lameness came home to me. I could not go out myself, nor, in face of Mrs. Moran's warning, could I send anybody else.

I must wait, hardest of all tasks, for the morning. Then come what might I would leave the house.

Shortly after midnight I heard three faint raps on the wall. I answered the signal in the recognised fashion, and a few minutes later the fanlight was softly pushed back, and the face, that awful livid face, looked down at me once more. Mounting a chair, I reached towards her.

"You are ill," I said softly; "what is it?"

"I am being poisoned," she answered, in a thin, quavering voice. "In the food I eat, the air I breathe, in my clothes, in the very paper on the walls of my room, there is poison. It chokes me, kills me, turning me slowly but surely from a living woman to a dead one. My uncle wants my money. Next month I am of age, and I can make a will and leave my fortune as I wish. If I die before that time, my fortune comes to him, my father's brother, the man who swore to love me as his own child. At first he was not unkind to me, later, when I learnt to love Arthur Merridew, his clerk, he changed. It did not suit him that I should marry, he wanted my money for other very different purposes. And so he sent Arthur away, and for me he planned a cruel and lingering death."

"But the doctor," I urged, "what does he say?"

"He is an old man and very stupid; he will not listen to a word against my uncle, and ascribes my complaints to a disordered brain. I cannot escape by myself; I am too weak, and the house is too well guarded. I know I must die, there is no hope of saving my life. But"—she stretched out a claw-like hand in piteous pleading—"but I don't want to die here; I must see him—see Arthur, before I go. If I could be with him a little while; just a few short days, it would not be so hard. Will you help me?" Her eyes, alight with fever, burnt into mine; the face, discoloured beyond recognition, worked convulsively.

"I will do my best," I answered; "at any rate, I can inform your lover as to what is happening. First of all, however, tell me why your aunt doesn't interfere?"

"She believes as the doctor says, that I am suffering from blood-poisoning—she does not suspect her husband of foul play. Besides, there is a reason, a great reason why she cannot, dare not, interfere with anything he does. She was married before she met uncle, and by her first husband she had a son named Dick. My uncle has discovered something about him and threatens to have him prosecuted whenever my aunt remonstrates; she's not a bad woman, but a very weak one."

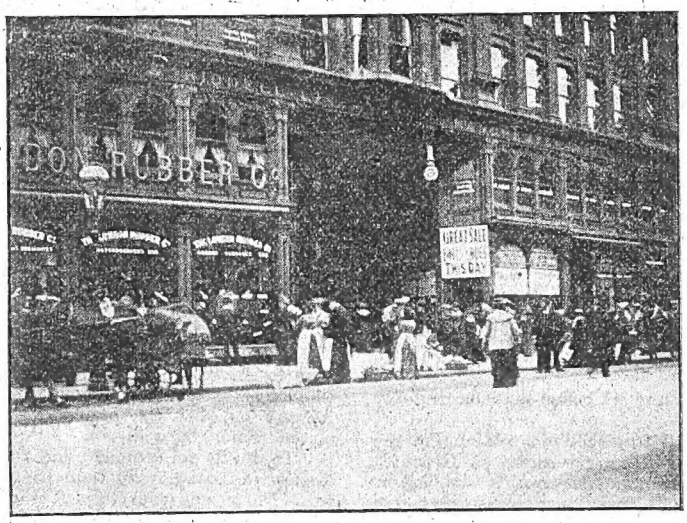
"Tell me," I said, "have there been any girls here before I came? Mrs. Moran said something about certain lady companions she had had?"

"Two girls were engaged at different times to stay with Aunt Mary. They were both orphans, without friends or families. They both died within a twelve-month of their coming here, and"—her voice sank to a low murmur—"the lives of both were insured in favour of my uncle."

I shrank back aghast and trembling at her words.

"You need not be afraid," she went on with a horrible laugh, "you'll be quite safe—until you are insured. Be careful," she added, "not to let him know where your people live, he will get their consent to the insurance, upon some plausible pretext, and then you will have difficulty to refuse."

"I shall not stay here after to-morrow," I said, gasping. "I'll get out of the house as soon as it is light."



The Great Western Arcade, the place appointed for the meeting between Sara and Mrs. Merridew.

"You won't leave me? You promised you'd help me. For the love of Heaven don't break your word."

"I can help you more easily outside the house than in it."

"Indeed you are wrong; at any moment my uncle may make up his mind to bring things to a quick conclusion. If you are in the house, you may be able to stop it, you may—oh!"—the poor thing began to sob in a fashion terrible to witness—"don't leave me, help me, for God's sake, help me to go to Arthur."

Against that plea I could not steel my heart. She, like me, was persecuted for the sake of the man she loved. I would do my best to help her, so long—I had to insist on the proviso—so long as her interests did not clash with Noel's.

She seemed comforted by my assurance, and with many thanks, crept softly from the fanlight back to her own room.

The next morning I was early astir; my ankle, though weak, pained me much less; with care, I felt sure I could get about as much as I wished. I came downstairs at the summons of the gong to breakfast. Mrs. Moran raised hands and eyes, in protest at my foolhardiness, but Truscot praised my courage and welcomed me enthusiastically.

"I suppose you are not able to come down to my office to-day, Miss Gillespie, otherwise I could install you as my assistant immediately; I have a lot of work on hand, and both my clerks are laid up with influenza."

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"Indeed, I am quite recovered," I said, with a smile, misleading as his own. "I'll be at Colemore Row by twelve o'clock, Mr. Moran, and shall expect a hard day's work."

I left the house a little after ten; with the aid of a stick I found I could walk without great inconvenience. Still my progress was necessarily slow, and I was glad to hail a cab which I encountered at the end of the Russell Road.

I directed the man to drive straight to the chief post office, an imposing building facing Victoria Square.

Leaning back, I surveyed the panorama of the streets; noting once more the sharpness of the contrast between the fashionable thoroughfares—Corporation Street, with its costly shops, New Street with its bristling activity—and the squalor of the side streets, through which one caught a glimpse of slums, black and festering cancers that eat into the very heart of the great City.

During the drive I decided on my plan of action. I would wire instructions to Maggie to appeal at once to the authorities. Meanwhile, I should remain at Truscot's house. There, whatever peril I might run, I was safe from Templeton and Co., in another place I might fall into the hands of the enemy. Besides—and this weighed with me—I had promised to help the unfortunate Lesbia, I could not turn my back on the unfortunate girl.

My telegram dispatched, I sought Mr. Arthur Merridew. He was engaged in a small office in Cherry Street, at the princely salary of a pound a week! A shabby, careworn youth. I was not impressed by his manners or his looks, until I mentioned Lesbia.

Then a smile flashed into his eyes that utterly transformed him. He became young, ardent, almost good-looking.

"She sent me a message?" he said; "how good, how dear of her."

He did not seem to have heard of her illness, and was horror-stricken when I told him of her condition.

"We cannot talk here," he said, "we may be overheard. These people know Mr. Moran well. I shall be free about five o'clock, if you will meet me in the Art Gallery, we could discuss matters undisturbed.

I agreed to the proposal, and, it being close on mid-day, took a cab to Colmore Row.

Mr. Moran's offices were well furnished in a solid and respectable fashion that reminded me unpleasantly of Great St. Helens. One large room opening into another smaller one comprised the suite. I found Moran surrounded by correspondence. He greeted me with a nod, and signed to me to take a seat at the table, and commenced to dictate the answers to his letters.

"You'll do," he said shortly. "You're as smart as I thought you were, and that's saying a great deal. I'll give you two pounds a week, if you care to come to me as typine. You can stay at Truscot's house into the bargain; you'll be a nice companion for my niece. Didn't know I had one?"—he laughed unpleasantly—"I'll introduce you to-night," he said abruptly, and recommenced his dictation.

He kept me hard at it till close on three, when we were interrupted by a caller.

Mr. Moran motioned to me to retire into the inner room, where I found a typewriter located. The latch of the door was defective, so that it did not quite close, any secrets that Mr. Moran and his visitor may have discussed, however, were rendered inaudible by the click of the machine—besides, their voices were quite low.

I heard the man depart, Mr. Moran accompanying him to the landing. In a minute or two the former returned; some one was with him, a man with a heavy step, and—I guessed, a portly figure.

"How's business?" said the new-comer.

He had a smooth, insinuating voice, a voice that of a sudden set the room whirling round me, and made my fingers shake and quiver on the keys.

"Templeton!" I gasped, and, panic-stricken, thumped the typewriter, fearing lest silence should arouse suspicion.

I did not catch Moran's reply—I was listening so eagerly to my enemy's next words.

"I'm glad to hear you're prospering. How's the niece? What, not pegged out yet? Good gracious, what constitutions these young people have! Now, there's a girl of ours—the firm's, I mean, who has been through enough trouble and anxiety to kill a man twice over, and yet she's still alive and apparently unhurt."

"Who is it?" said Moran. "The girl who stole your notes? Some of your people sent me a bill describing her. Red hair, green eyes—isn't that it? Doesn't sound very attractive."

"That's the girl. I've reason," Templeton seemed to draw nearer the other, "I've reason to believe she's here—in Birmingham. I've set our best men to trace her out, but so far it's no go. She's covered her tracks so safely, there's no unearthing them. Now you, as a local man, may know better how to set about the business, we *must* find her, it's more important now than ever."

"Why, has the value of the document she stole gone up?"

"That's so. It's worth more now than it ever was. The reason"—Templeton hesitated, in my anxiety to catch what followed, I raised my fingers from the keyboard, not daring to press a single letter.

"We've secured Noel Masterman, and put him in a safe, sure place. Nobody—except a factory girl, at Northampton, and she can't prove it—knows he is in England. In his absence we are authorised to deal with his estate. We can and will deal with it, most expeditiously—only——"

"I understand," said Moran, "everything is to your hand except the deed, and that——"

"Is in the hands of Sara Gillespie. The question is, will you help us to find her?"

"What are your terms?" said Moran brusquely

"How much do you want?"

"A fourth of the estate."

"Preposterous! Do you take me for a fool?"

"I take you for a hard-headed man of business, Templeton, and, as such, I give you three minutes to consider my offer. If the girl is to be found I shall have to devote money and time to the business. I shall have to run considerable risks. The longer she remains hidden the less your chance of success. At any moment the bubble may burst. Masterman may escape, Sara Gillespie——"

"That will do, Moran," said the other, "I don't want to discuss any more. We want the girl, in fact, we must have her. I'll accept your terms. Find Sara Gillespie, and you stand in with the three of us. A fourth of the estate to each."

"I will produce the lady," answered Moran, "there's no fear as to that."

He rose from his chair as he spoke, and walked across the office, towards the room in which I sat. I counted his steps, one, two, three—Good Heavens, in another second he would reach the door—and I—I, who had fought so long and so painfully for Noel, would find defeat.

I covered my face with my hands, leaning my head upon the table, and waited—as I think a victim must wait for the executioner's knife—for Moran to denounce me.

A heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder, sick unto death I turned. Through the half open door I caught a glimpse of Templeton. His back was towards me, he stood waiting, impatient for Moran to return. Could I make a dash for freedom—rush through the door, past Templeton, and out into the corridor? I might have done so, but for my ankle. As it was I made a step across the room.

Truscot caught hold of me, smiling at my torture of suspense.

Then, with a little laugh, he released me.

"Get on with your letters, my dear," he said, "you're not wanted in the other room this afternoon."

I dropped back limp as a rag into my chair, unable to realise that the danger was past. I understood it thoroughly, however, when, some ten minutes later, Templeton having departed, Moran reappeared.

"Well," he said, "are you going to thank me for what I've done? Poor little girl, you're quite white. You're shaking," and he stroked my face in a caressing fashion, that sent the

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blood flushing to my cheeks. He noticed my discomfiture, and seemed annoyed at it.

"You're wonderfully sensitive, Miss Gillespie, considering the adventures you have passed through. Come, don't you think you owe me some gratitude for what I've done for you?"

He leant towards me as he spoke; Truscot Moran was going to kiss me! As his face, handsome, despite its evil mouth and eyes, came nearer, a flame of anger, indignation, and contempt, rose within me. He was the only person who could help me, the one man who stood between Templeton and me; but all considerations of the kind went down before my indignation. I struck at him with my clenched fist, leaving a mark upon his evil, smiling face.

He fell back with an oath.

"That will do," he said slowly, as, frightened at my own temerity, I gasped forth some sort of an apology. "I'll conduct all further negotiations with you on strictly business principles, Miss Gillespie, be sure of that," he sneered as he spoke, and my heart contracted miserably.

"I've undertaken to hand you over to Templeton on conditions which you overheard this afternoon. I shall keep my undertaking, the only thing left for me to decide is when I shall complete the contract, whether, in short, I shall inform Templeton of your whereabouts to-night, or in a week, or in a month, as the case may be."

"Not to-night," I pleaded desperately. "Give me till to-morrow, just till to-morrow."

"I'll give you three days," was the reply, "on certain conditions. It never pays to give something for nothing, Miss Gillespie—as I have just learnt. If you want three days' liberty, you must pay the price. It's not a hard, not an excessive price—you've just got to pretend you're my niece, Lesbia Moran, for half an hour, that's all. To put it plainly, you've to accompany me to an insurance office where I shall take out a policy for you as Lesbia. The doctor will examine you, and, finding you healthy—you look very strong, Miss Gillespie—will pass you, as a suitable client. Lesbia, as you are aware, is dying, she will be dead before the month is out; at her death I shall claim £5,000, the amount of the policy taken out this afternoon."

"It's—it's fraudulent!" I gasped.

"Quite so, and you will be a party to the fraud."

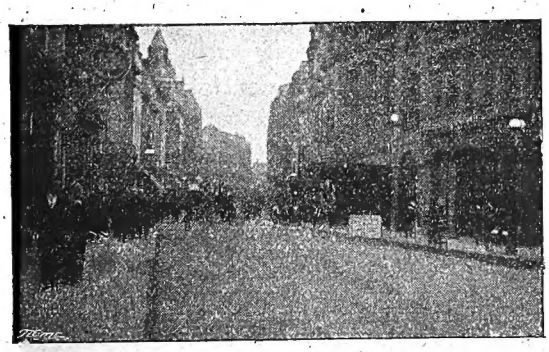
"I can't do it," I said desperately, "whatever happens."

"Very good. I'll ring up Templeton on the telephone and have a chat with him."

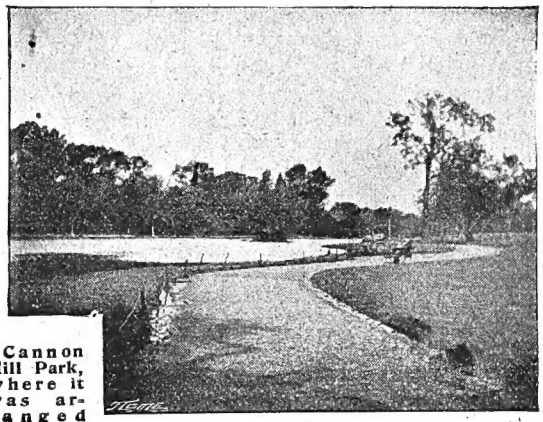
He strolled towards the instrument as he spoke, and leisurely proceeded to ring up. For a minute I did battle for conscience' sake. It was a fraud, and by consenting I became involved. And yet, could I refuse? For Noel's sake, my sweetheart, who was in danger, who, if I lost my liberty would be left friendless, and alone, without a soul to fight his battle.

Love before all things was my motto, for love's sake I would do even this.

"You need not ring up Mr. Templeton," I said slowly, "I will come with you to the office and pass as your niece."



The Insurance Offices, to which Sara was taken, were situated near New Street.



Cannon Hill Park, where it was arranged that Lesbia and her lover, Arthur Merridew, should be brought together.

"That's a sensible young woman," he said calmly; "I thought you'd come round in time. There's just one thing more to settle, and then we'll get off. You'd better understand that it's quite hopeless for you to attempt to escape. There's no spot in which you can hide in Birmingham unknown to me, nothing you can do I shall not find out. You must have realised that for yourself from what Templeton said. To-day, for instance," he smiled serenely, "you called and interviewed Mr. Arthur Merridew at his office in Cherry Street. Don't trouble to protest, Miss Gillespie, it's useless; I'll keep my part of the bargain, if you'll keep yours. To-day is Wednesday, on Saturday—three days from now—I hand you to Templeton, meantime, take my advice, and don't endeavour to escape, if you do, you will merely precipitate the event."

Against my will, his words convinced me; I realised there was no chance of escape for the next three days. Silently I got ready to accompany Mr. Moran, and listened to certain instructions as to the coming interview. I did not speak until we drew up at the Insurance Offices near New Street. Mr. Moran introduced me as his niece; he had evidently arranged the interview, for all preliminaries had already been settled. I was ushered into a room, where the Doctor, a kindly-looking man, proceeded to test my lungs and heart.

The examination was entirely satisfactory. He told me I was in good health, and likely to live to an advanced age. At the last moment my courage failed me; I felt I must confess I was not Lesbia. I turned towards him appealingly.

"I—I—am not——"

Mr. Moran's voice immediately outside the door checked the words. I must go through with the business—for Noel's sake.

"You did that very well, my dear," said my "uncle," as we left the office. "You've the makings of a first-class adventuress."

I looked at him quite steadily, and said:

"I've done what I undertook, Mr. Moran. You named the terms, I accepted them; now the positions are reversed. It is for me to dictate; for you to obey. You promised me three days of safety—to wait till Saturday before you gave me up. Listen to me, on the day you betray me to Templeton, the Insurance Company will be acquainted with the fraud that's just been practised. I have provided against every contingency; I wrote a note while I was with the Doctor, and posted it a moment ago in that box. The note was addressed to friends whom I can trust; I have instructed them that any morning they fail to get a telegram, assuring them of my safety, they are to post on the inclosure sent with the letter. That inclosure is addressed to the Secretary of the Insurance Company."

I smiled as I concluded, and gazed at him serenely.

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"I rather think I have the best of this bargain, Mr. Moran; and now, I'm going to look at the pictures in the Art Gallery. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to run away, I shall be back at Russell Road a little later."

"And pray what are you going to do, if you meet with Templeton?" he sneered.

"That's your look-out, not mine; any morning my friends don't hear from me, you know what will ensue."

He ground his teeth with rage, and yet unwilling admiration shone in his eyes.

"Little vixen!" he murmured, "you have done me this time. The next——" He smiled significantly, and turned aside.

It was considerably past five when I reached the Art Gallery; I feared Arthur Merridew had gone, but after a little search I found him. He was in the first room, seated in front of one of the greatest pictures of modern times, "The Last of England." He was gazing at the exquisite face of the woman, as with her blue eyes, glistening with tears, she looks her last on her native land. His own eyes were misty, and his lips moved, seeming to shape the name of "Lesbia."

He started when I spoke to him, and, pointing to the picture, asked if I did not see the likeness.

"Lesbia's hair is just that beautiful shade of chestnut; those are her very eyes, and the mouth is the same."

I gasped at the words, and thought of the poor distorted face that had looked out at me from the window.

"Lesbia is not like that now," I said "you must understand she is terribly altered, she declares she is being poisoned, and I am inclined to agree with her."

"We will go to the police," he declared excitedly, "and ask for Moran's arrest."

"Nothing of the sort," I answered impatiently; "no one would take any notice of you. The only thing to be done is to plan an escape. Lesbia must be got out of the house. I will manage to see her to-night and take her some food, which she can eat in safety, so that by Friday she will be a little stronger. This is my plan—Mr. and Mrs. Moran must be got out of the house on Friday evening about seven. At that hour, you must be waiting with a carriage a few doors from Truscot's house. I will bring Lesbia to you—the rest is in your hands."

"It's impossible for me to meet you near the house; Moran always has someone on the watch when he's away, and that would spoil it all; you see, he's always suspected me of trying to communicate with Lesbia. He tried to compel me to leave Birmingham—I had great trouble to get any work after he discharged me; now I am only kept on sufferance at a miserable salary of a pound a week."

"What do you propose then?" I asked impatiently; I was sorry for him, but it was not fitting to sympathise.

"I'll wait for you in Cannon Hill Park; I'll be there at seven, and stay till you come."

"Very good; meanwhile you must do your share. Find out the favourite haunts of Mrs. Moran's son Dick. Then send a wire in his name urging her to meet him. Also you must wire to Moran. I will write you the message you must send to him, and post it on to you. Can you do this?"

"Of course; I am very grateful to you for suggesting it."

"I must warn you, Lesbia's very ill. She will not be able to stand much of a journey. Where are you going to take her on Friday?"

"I'll take her to my mother, she'll look after her and nurse her back to health. Also," he flushed and hesitated, "I shall persuade her to marry me almost at once. A man can protect his wife against everything."

He looked too absurdly young and insignificant to protect anybody; but he seemed truly fond of Lesbia, and was not without intelligence.

"How shall I know if you've carried out these arrangements?" I asked.

"Go down Corporation Street on Friday at five o'clock, past the Great Western Arcade; my mother will be standing at the entrance. She's an old lady and wears a black beaded cloak, and a bonnet with violets. Look at her carefully, but don't speak. If she nods to you, you will understand everything is satisfactory. If she makes no sign, Lesbia's escape must be delayed."

I agreed to the proposal and once more repeated my instructions, wished him "Good luck!" and departed, leaving him to feast again upon "The Last of England."

By this time my ankle was aching pretty badly; I managed, however, to get to the post office and inquire for telegrams.

No wire had as yet been received; I was not over anxious as to the delay—I had already matured a scheme, by means of which I hoped to extort Noel's whereabouts from Templeton, through the agency of Moran. Thinking it wiser to save my strength than my money, I took a cab and drove to a large grocer's in Corporation Street, where I purchased a bottle of brandy, some strong soup, and some eggs.

Brilliantly lit and busy with a pleasant, bustling throng, crowding to look into the shops, Corporation Street was at its best. I envied the women with their husbands, the girls with their sweethearts. When—ah! when should I be once more with Noel?

I stared dreamily at the stream of sight-seers, oblivious of the cab, forgetful of Lesbia—even of myself. I was recalled to things present by a touch on the arm.

"If you want to meet the senior partner, Miss Gillespie, he's just round the corner. He'll be here directly."

Truscot Moran's eyes flashed into mine.

There was no need for a second warning; forgetful of my ankle, I flew across the pavement, and bundled into the hansom.

The next minute we were dashing along, in the direction of Russell Road. The trams with their hideous clang and clatter, passed us at intervals, and as usual sent a thrill of apprehension through me. A sort of panic seized me at the approach of these monsters. They filled me with an unreasoning terror.

Nothing of note occurred that evening. Mrs. Moran, sat placid in a gown of ruby velvet, and lamented Truscot's late returning. I endured both the gown and the lamentations till ten o'clock, then I said "Good night," and went upstairs.

I passed Rachel on the way; she glanced at me suspiciously, and hardly returned my greeting. In my calculations as to Friday, I had left out the grim and silent woman.

When the house was silent and the hour late, I cautiously rapped on the fanlight. Lesbia looked a little less ghastly than on the previous occasion; she told me she had abstained from food during the day, and the result seemed beneficial. I passed her the eggs and brandy, with directions to beat them

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up together and swallow at intervals during the next twenty-four hours. I instructed her to get some outdoor clothing in readiness by Friday, when I hoped she would see her lover. I repeated Arthur's messages, and encouraged her to the best of my capacity.

The next day passed uneventfully. I worked at the office until six, then returned to Truscot's house, calling at the Post Office on my way. Maggie wired to say she had been to the police, but they seemed to regard her story with suspicion. If my plan succeeded, I was not likely to want their assistance, however. To-morrow—by to-morrow—success or failure would be assured. If I could get Lesbia away from Truscot's house to the safe keeping of Merridew, I should practically have the whip hand of Moran.

I determined to drive a bargain with him, hard and fast. I should threaten that unless he obtained for me Noel's whereabouts I would expose him out and out to the insurance office, I would produce the real Lesbia, and in face of such a piece of evidence, Moran would be lost.

Thursday evening I handed Lesbia a fresh supply of food, I repeated my instructions as to her conduct the next day. At six o'clock, when Rachel usually brought up her tea, she would complain of headache, and express a desire to go to bed. Having seen her safely tucked up, the woman would go downstairs, leaving the patient free to dress herself. By that time, if things went well, Mr. and Mrs. Moran would have gone out, and the coast would be clear. I had not yet thought out a way of removing Rachel, I left that over, hoping for an inspiration at the last.

The hours dragged terribly the next day. The suspense was almost intolerable. I had instructed Merridew as to the nature of the wire he was to send—it was a message of urgency, purporting to come from Templeton—and all day long I hoped and feared for its arrival. Not until Moran was leaving the office for the day, did the telegram arrive. He tore the wire open, read its purport, then, with a cunning glance at me, lounged out of the office.

Did he believe it, or had he scented forgery? I had no means of discovering whether or no he was already in communication with Templeton. If that were so, the game was already lost. There was still one chance, however, in my favour. Fortune is kind to the rash, and my plan was rash indeed.

From the office I made my way to Corporation Street. Anxiety kept a keen look-out for Merridew's old mother. I saw her waiting a short distance from the entrance to the Arcade, a pretty old lady, slight and fragile, with silver hair banded over her ears, neat black gown and beaded mantle, and a small bunch of violets in her bonnet.

She tightened her lips as she caught sight of me, and nodded her head with much insistence. I smiled, passed on, and, hailing the nearest cab, drove as quickly as possible to Russell Road.

I arrived at Truscot's house about a quarter to six; from that time events came quickly. Mrs. Moran had received a telegram from her son, Janet informed me, and would not be back till late.

"It's a fine night," I said encouragingly, "a run would do you good. If you like to go out I'll answer any rings at the bell, Rachel needn't know, and I don't suppose the cook will mind."

Janet dimpled with pleasure, and a few minutes later I had the satisfaction of seeing her trim figure running down the garden path. My next difficulty was Rachel.

On going upstairs I found Lesbia looking through the fanlight. The poor thing had fastened a sailor-hat on her thin hair, excitement had brought a less livid colour to her cheeks. She was quite self-possessed, and ready to do all I told her.

"You've taken some soup, and eggs, and brandy?" I questioned.

She nodded.

"That's good! Do you feel very weak?"

"Horribly, but I shall be strong enough to get away from this house. I shall keep up till then——" her mouth worked, and large tears fell on her hand

"You mustn't cry now," I said peremptorily. "Pull yourself together like a good girl. Is your door locked?"

"Yes, and Rachel has the key."

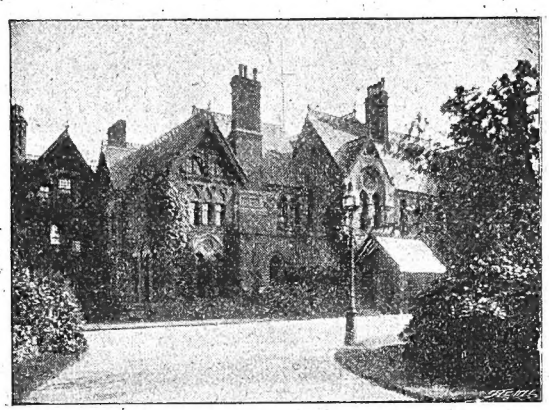
Now this was an eventuality I had not foreseen. For a moment I wondered if it would be possible for Lesbia to climb through the fan-light, and escape through my door. A moment's consideration convinced me of the impossibility of such a project.

"Lesbia," said I, "you must ring the bell violently, furiously, as if you were alarmed, or taken very ill. Rachel will hurry to answer it, when she's outside the door and you hear her turn the key, call out that she must come at once. In her hurry she will perhaps leave the key in the door; I shall be outside waiting to seize it.

Lesbia fell in with the project, and rang the bell imperiously and repeatedly, till Rachel, grumbling but alarmed, appeared.

"Quick, quick!" cried Lesbia, "Make haste, you'll be too late."

Muttering and angry, Rachel pushed the door open, she withdrew the key, but in her haste it slipped from her fingers. She stooped to pick it up, but I was too quick for her. Thrusting my hand over her shoulder, I grabbed it



Highbury, the residence of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, where Sara went to appeal for help.

from the floor. She clutched me round the waist, and tried to drag me down beside her, but, too lissom for her to hold, I wriggled myself free. Lesbia took advantage of this interlude with more courage and initiative than I thought she possessed. I don't quite know how it happened—things came so quickly—but in an incredibly short time I stood beside her on the landing, the key of the door in my pocket, and Rachel locked in the room.

She was not likely to stay there long, however, already her knocks and bangings, to say nothing of her shouts, seemed to fill the house.

But for Janet's timely absence, and the fact that the cook was both lazy and deaf, our manœuvre would have been futile. As it was, I had half carried, half dragged my charge down the stairs and out into the street, just as the cook arrived in the hall to investigate the disturbance. I whistled to the hired brougham waiting in readiness, and, lifting Lesbia in my arms—the poor thing was incredibly thin—carried her towards it.

The door banged, the carriage drove off up Russell Road to Cannon Hill Park; so far my plan had answered perfectly.

I had grave doubts, however, at one period, whether my charge would last until the journey's end. Her sudden spurt of courage had exhausted the last remnant of vitality. She lay back motionless, it seemed to me dead. I poured brandy down her throat, and abjured her in Arthur's name, to rally. She revived a little, but I felt very anxious, and it was with

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grave misgivings I left her, on arriving at the Park, to seek out Arthur.

He was not within sight at the gate, and as in desperation I hurried on, I yet could catch no glimpse of him. Mad with fear I ran at top speed calling his name.

I found him gazing at the water, murmuring Lesbia's name. I'm afraid I roused him from his reverie rather abruptly.

"Come at once," I said, giving him a little shake. "You'll find her gone if you're not careful."

He needed no further spur, and together we returned to Lesbia. I watched their meeting, and forgave the young man all his sentiment and affectation by reason of his tenderness towards her. Neither by word nor look did he betray the awful shock her alteration must have given him.

She had been a comely-looking girl when last he saw her—now—I sighed, and tears sprang to my eyes.

Gathering her in his arms, he murmured all his love and affection. My last glimpse showed me her head upon his shoulder, gazing into his eyes.

And to me they did not give a thought!

Now that Lesbia was safely off my mind, I turned my thoughts to my own affairs—and Noel's. Moran I calculated would return about eight. At that hour I decided to call at the house, inform him of my share in what had taken place, and threaten to expose him unless he obtained from Templeton particulars as to my lover's whereabouts. Busy with my thoughts I turned into "Reddings," watching the lights of the distant town shine through the trees.

I walked a short distance along the footpath, until I reached a hedgerow, thick and high.

The next minute I had stopped short, my senses on the alert. At the other side of the hedge Templeton and Moran were conversing.

"I won't come any farther, thank you," said the former. "I must get back to the hotel. You understand how matters lie?"

"Exactly," Moran answered, "I hand the girl over to you to-morrow, in return you give me the address of her friends at Northampton, so that I can stop their communicating with the insurance people!'

"That's so, I think we're in sight of home at last, Moran. It's been a tough fight, but at last she's in our power."

They shook hands and parted, leaving me overwhelmed with the discovery. The ground was cut from under my feet; I dare not denounce Moran, the denunciation would entail my own discovery.

What could I do, to whom could I appeal in my distress?

Like a flash the answer came. I would go to the idol of Birmingham, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain himself. Surely he would listen to my story, surely he would give me help. Buoyed up with hope I tramped the road that led from the "Reddings" to Highbury, but when, the large gates passed, I stood in full view of the great house, my courage failed me.

As I stood hesitating, the door opened, Chamberlain himself, accompanied by his son, walked down the steps. Before I had time to frame an appeal, they had stepped into the waiting carriage and had driven off. My last chance was gone!

Utterly exhausted, I made my way to a seat by the roadside, there I waited till a belated cab, journeying back to the city, offered to take me as a cheap fare. I decided to go to Mrs. Merridew's, where I could pass the night, and therefore agreed to his proposal. The cab deposited me in the middle of Corporation Street; Arthur's mother lived in a street off the Moseley Road. I turned in that direction; my way led me through Old Square, the terminus of those terrible steam trams. For a long time I stood at the corner of the Square, hesitating to cross, for fear I might stumble and fall a victim to one of the trams. As I stood waiting on the kerb, debating with myself when I should take the plunge, I became conscious that someone was staring at me from the other side of Corporation Street!

I looked up and recognised the senior partner. Panic-stricken I rushed across the Square, hoping to evade him in the traffic. Fearful of losing me he launched himself into the road at the same moment. A shout rose from the by-standers—my heart was in my throat, I glanced back. The shouts grew louder.

"Take care, take care!" the people cried. And then I realised what the warning meant. Within a few feet of me, steering straight for me, was a huge tram, belching forth clouds of smoke—another second it would be upon me—another second—I stood transfixed with horror, I could not move

(Another long instalment of "The Pursuit of Sara" next week.)

THE LOVE of MIRIAM NORTH.

How a Careless Youth Hurt a Woman's Feelings.

PEOPLE said that Miriam North never had a love affair in her life; but her world did not know what Miriam North knew as she stood one night before her mirror and curled a few loose locks of her reddish-brown hair that had fallen over her forehead.

When she had finished she stepped back a little and looked at herself with a sense of satisfaction. She looked very well, nobody could deny that. One would not think she was thirty years old, she said to herself with a slightly heightened colour that became her.

Miriam was a rather pretty woman. She had a pale, creamy complexion and a wealth of burnished reddish hair that Will admired so. Her face was a long oval; she had good brows and rather fine eyes of the same warm hue as her hair. Her nose and mouth were large. To-night her hat suited her, and the dull fawn of her jacket threw into relief her ruddy hair and eyes. She caught herself hoping that Will would notice it, and then threw back her head and called herself a fool.

"If anybody guessed, how they would laugh at me," she said, biting her lips sharply.

When she went down, Will and Kate and Bob were waiting impatiently for her at the front door. Kate was sure they would be late for the concert on account of Miriam's fussiness.

She was Miriam's sister, and Bob was her brother, but Will Harper was merely a distant cousin. A handsome, round-faced, boyish fellow of nineteen or twenty, he was listening to Kate's lively chatter with a rather bored expression. His eyes lightened up as Miriam came downstairs, and he stepped forward eagerly.

Kate and Bob snickered significantly as they started down the paths between the rows of red and yellow dahlias. Kate was eighteen, and, in common with the rest of Lynborough, looked on Miriam as a confirmed old maid. It seemed to her too funny for anything that Will should prefer Miriam's company to hers. At the gate Bob paused to call out:

"If you two stand mooning there all night, you'll be late for the concert."

Miriam winced a little. She was pinning a cluster of asters to Will's coat.

"You look stunning to-night, Mirry," he whispered admiringly.

She coloured again with a pleasure she was ashamed of.

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How foolish of her to be so pleased with a boy's admiration. They walked slowly down the long, elm-shaded street in the purple gloom of the dusk. When the concert was over they walked back again in the moonlight. Bob and Kate had gone in before them, but, as they turned in at the gate, Will drew Miriam aside into the shadow of the trees.

"Don't let's go in for a while, Mirry. It's just the thing out here. And I want to have a talk with you before I go, you know I'm off to college to-morrow, and won't be back till next Spring. I don't believe you are a bit sorry."

"Oh, Will!"

"Well, I don't. You know how much I think of you, Mirry. I've told you so often, and you've just put me off and off, and never would give me a decided answer. But you will now, Mirry, won't you, before I go. Promise you'll marry me as soon as I get through college, and I'll be the happiest fellow in the world."

He put his arm round her coaxingly, and bent forward to look up into her face.

Miriam laughed a little.

"You foolish boy! Why won't you stop talking such nonsense? I've told you often enough I'm too old for you to marry. It would never do. Why, you're just a boy, Will, and I—I am an old maid."

"You're nothing of the sort, Mirry," he said stoutly. "You're far prettier than Kate. I don't care if you are older than I—that will never make any difference. I've known you all my life—and we've been such chums—and you must marry me, Mirry. Promise me now, do, dear."

"You will change your mind in a year or two," she warned him.

"I won't. If you won't take me, I'll never look at any other girl. Oh, Mirry, why can't you say now at once that you'll marry me, and make a fellow happy, and not keep putting him off this way every time?"

Miriam sighed. Will had said the same thing a dozen times that summer. Nobody knew or guessed it but herself. Will Harper had always made a sort of second home at the North's. Miriam had been a grown-up young lady when he was a boy in knickerbockers, and he had always been a pet with her. It was only this summer that he had taken it into his head to be so—ridiculous.

Her own family looked upon her as very ancient, and thought Will's boyishly displayed devotion partook of a filial character. Hadn't Mirry always patronised him? Only Miriam knew the difference.

"Will," she said finally, "it seems a very silly thing for us to think of—very silly. You'll say so yourself some day. I can't give you any answer now. But if, when you come home next Spring, you feel just the same and—and—ask me again, I'll give you your answer then."

This did not suit Will at all, of course. He assured and protested that he would always feel the same, and that it was all nonsense, and positive cruelty besides, to drag him through a year of miserable suspense, when she might just as well settle the whole thing at once. But Miriam was firm, and Will had to accede grumblingly. Well, he would write her anyhow—every week, and she must write him—and he would work like a slave at college for her sake—and she wasn't to forget that she was as good as engaged to him.

They went in then for Will to say good-bye to them all. Kate noticed Miriam's crimson cheeks at once, and asked her if Will had been painting or kissing her out in the garden. Kate was the terror of poor Miriam's life.

Will said good-bye all round, and parted from Miriam with a whispered—

"Remember now, Mirry."

After he had gone, and while Mrs. North and Kate and Bob were saying how much they would miss him, and praising him up for a smart boy and likely to do well, Miriam went softly upstairs and sat down in the moonlight.

She was very happy—and a year would soon pass—and if Will was as fond of her as ever when he came back—she did not complete the last sentence, but buried her face softly in her hands, and blushed at her foolish dreams.

Will wrote regularly, as he had promised, and Miriam wrote back. In the Spring he came home. On the night she expected him Miriam was dressing painstakingly in her room, having first locked the door to keep Kate out. She tried on a dozen different dresses, and finally settled on a new white one. When she had finished dressing she surveyed herself contentedly. She looked well and hoped Will would like her appearance. Pure white suited her. She pinned a cluster of roses at her belt, and picked out a perfect bud for Will. She hoped that Kate would not notice anything unusual, or comment on it if she did.

She peered with some disquiet at the visible lines about her mouth and the crowsfeet at the corners of her eyes, and put up a finger to smooth them away. After all, she reflected, they were no plainer than they were a year ago, and Will had loved her then.

She pulled up the blind and sat down by the open window to watch the sunset through the trees. She was very, very happy. Will—her Will—would come in a few minutes—the dear boy. She had been cruel to make him wait so long for his answer. But the winter had gone, and he should have

Miriam sat down on the rustic seat, and Will stood beside her.

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it at last. How happy they would be, they two! It should make no difference, after all, that she was the older; at least she felt as young as he. He did not care. So she hugged herself in a little paroxysm of joy. To hurry the lagging moments she got out Will's letters to read over. Most of them were rather interesting, though not at all sentimental; but then she had forbidden him to write sentimentally. The last ones were rather short and dry—but of course it was all the fault of those "beastly examinations," Will himself said so. The last one of all was a mere scrawl—written a week before college closed. Miriam kissed the signature before she put the letter back in the bundle. Short or long, after all, what did letters matter? In a few minutes she would have Will himself.

When she heard his ring, she stood up, her heart fluttering nervously, her colour coming and going like a schoolgirl's. But she would not go down straight away—not until the first meetings were over and he had asked for her. Then she would slip down and in, and Will would spring to meet her and shake her hand with a little shy squeeze, as of old, and give her a significant look from his blue eyes. Then, after a while, when it grew dusk, she would slip out in the garden, and Will would follow her, and put his arm round her, and tell her he had come for his answer. She planned it all out, as she walked up and down the floor, listening to the sounds below. The minutes passed very slowly, but still nobody came. Half an hour went by before Kate came flying upstairs and into the room.

"Mirry, why on earth don't you come down? Don't you know Will is here? He's asking for you. You'll take Will's breath away completely, Mirry, if you swoop down upon him in all that splendour at once. Hadn't I better go down and prepare him?"

"Don't be idiotic, Kate," said Miriam, not so sharply as she might have. Kate stood aside in meek awe to let her pass. She went downstairs a little dizzily, and paused for an instant at the door with a sense of going through some carefully rehearsed performance.

Will was sitting on an ottoman, with his right foot hooked over his left knee, and his hat and cane on the chair beside him, vigorously discoursing to open-mouthed Bob on the events of his freshman year.

Becoming aware of Miriam's presence, he sprang up eagerly and gave her a hearty handshake, without any attempt at the old-time squeeze.

"Why, Mirry, is it you? I thought you weren't going to come down to see a fellow at all. You're looking well, though, isn't she, Bob? How are you, Mirry?"

"I'm—I'm very well," stammered Miriam faintly. It was the one solitary thing she could think of saying as she backed awkwardly to a seat in the corner. Will dropped back on his ottoman and resumed the interrupted thread of his speech to Bob. Miriam listened vaguely without understanding a word of it.

When Kate and Mrs. North came in again Will turned himself round to take in the circle. He had not changed much in appearance; there was a faint dark line on his upper lip, which he caressed with infinite care.

When it grew dusk Miriam rose and went noiselessly out. She had been pacing up and down the path for a long while before Will came. He was smoking a cigar, which he removed for an instant as he came up to her.

"Hope you don't object to a cigar, Mirry?"

"Oh, no, not at all," gasped Miriam.

"Glad of that," said Will carelessly. "It's a beastly bore when a fellow can't enjoy his cigar in peace. You were always a sensible sort, though, Mirry. Fine evening, isn't it? How have you been getting on?"

"Oh, very well," flatly.

"Any prospects of a lively time in Lynnborough this summer, or is it going to be as dull as it usually is?"

"I don't know," faltered poor Miriam confusedly; "there is some rumour of a few garden-parties or so."

"Beastly bores," said Will, with whom the expression seemed a pet one. "Well, of course, one doesn't expect much go in a place like this. Just as well, I suppose, one way you look at it. I've got some studying to do this summer."

"How did you get on in your examinations, Will?" said Miriam, plucking up a little courage at the prospect of a subject she could talk about.

"Well," said Will confidentially, "I don't mind telling you, Mirry, because I know you'll keep it close. You always were a brick like that. I didn't do much, and that's the fact. Didn't fail in any except those two, but it was just as much as ever I scraped up a bare pass in the rest. Don't tell the folks. I'm ashamed of it, I'll own. I really meant to work hard and distinguish myself and all that, but somehow—well, I don't know how it was exactly. There was always so much going on—parties and football and larks with the boys. And a fellow is never expected to do much his first year, except the plugs. But I mean to pull up next year, straight."

They had got round now to the rustic seat. Miriam sat down meekly and Will stood beside her.

"Look here, Mirry," he said awkwardly, getting very red in the face even in the dusk, "I know you're afraid I'm going to make a duffer of myself again this year, but you needn't be. That's what I came out to tell you. I knew you'd be glad."

"Oh!" said Miriam faintly.

"Yes, I was an awful fool last year; I see it now, just as you said I would. You were a regular brick, Mirry, to be so patient with me, and put up with my nonsense so long as you did. It would have served me right if you'd snubbed me as I deserved. What a verdant kid you must have thought me, though you never let on. But I've got a little more sense now, I hope. You needn't be scared of my relapsing into idiocy again. We can be good friends, as we always were, but I'll promise to behave myself."

"Of course," said Miriam, without any clear idea of what she was saying.

"I say, Mirry," went on Will confidentially. "I've got a picture here I want to show you, to see what you think of it. You're a pretty good judge of faces, I know. I'll strike a match so you can see. There!"

Miriam took the picture in her cold hand, and looked at it.

"She is very pretty. Who—who is it, Will?"

"Florrie Moore; pretty name, isn't it? She's the daughter of our professor of Greek. Not much wonder I got plucked in it, is it? She's just eighteen, and as sweet as a peach. All the fellows in our class were crazy over her. Not to boast a little bit, though, Mirry, there wasn't one of them in it when I was about."

Miriam handed the photograph back silently. Will went on undauntedly:

"I met her at an at-home just the week after I went there. I was clean gone from the start, and so were all the other boys. I tell you, it was lively going for awhile. But I won her. Might as well tell you the whole business, Mirry—I know you won't tell anyone—we're engaged, Florrie and I. Don't give it away to Kate or Bob, though, Mirry."

"Of course not," said Miriam, wearily. "I suppose—I ought to congratulate you, Will. You have my best wishes."

"Thanks awfully. When you see Florrie—I'm going to have mother ask her up next summer, of course—you'll agree with me that I am a lucky fellow. It will be such a comfort to have someone to talk to about her, Mirry."

Miriam got up. There were limits to any one's endurance, even that of an old maid on the wrong side of thirty.

"I must go in, I think," she said, in a lifeless voice. "It's very damp out here."

Will sprang up repentantly and tossed his cigar away.

"Of course it is. What a beast I am to be keeping you out here! You haven't anything on your head, either. Just like me! I'm so selfish when I get talking about my own affairs."

Miriam went in and upstairs. On the landing she gave a little bitter laugh. She locked herself in her room and fell on her knees beside the window, sobbing hysterically.

That was the end of Miriam North's love affair. The world will tell you that she never had one.

Lilian Montgomery.

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Unsolved Love Problems.

A Prize of One Guinea is offered to the reader who sends in the most Satisfactory Solution to the Problem. Replies should not exceed one hundred words. See "Your Editor Chats."

IV.—THE DOUBT OF MILDRED DALRYMPLE.

In the early summer of 1899, a girl sat at her writing-table in the old Manor House of Sunningdale.

It was a bright, pleasant room looking out on to the smooth green lawns and spreading cedars that were the feature of Sunningdale Manor, and the brilliant morning sunshine that streamed through the open window seemed to linger fondly on the dark head of the youthful mistress of that fair domain.

Mildred Dalrymple was not exactly a beauty, her features were too irregular, and her complexion too sallow, but she possessed a shapely figure, a graceful carriage, and a well-shaped head that was exquisitely poised on a charming neck.

Moreover her manner was most sweet and winning, and she had an instinctive talent for dressing herself to the best advantage, and the money wherewith to do it, so that many a man had before now taken her for a beauty, even with eyes all undazzled by her possessions.

With a tender smile on her sensitive mouth, and a glitter of unshed tears in her brown eyes, she was writing a few words on a thin slip of paper:

"*She comes to ask your pardon. Will you forgive her the hasty words?*"

This she carefully wrapped round a charming miniature of herself, exquisitely set with diamonds, and that bore the inscription on the back: "From Mildred Dalrymple to Rodney Brookes.—May, 1899." And then, putting it back into its leather case, addressed the little packet to "Rodney Brookes, Esq., Reithock, S. Africa."

"There!" she murmured to herself. "That is the *amende honorable*, and he can't do less than humble himself before me. After all, he was more angry than I, and said much worse things, and I suppose that is why it is so easy for me to ask his pardon first. And what is the good of all my money if he won't take a penny of it, but will go out to that horrid South Africa to make some for himself," and she ran out of the room to take the precious packet to the post herself, singing gaily as she did so.

A few months previously, Rodney and Mildred, affianced lovers, had parted with angry words because Rodney refused point blank to marry her "without a penny to his name," and insisted he should go abroad and get a respectable number of the said coins before settling in ease on his wife's estate.

She, hurt that any consideration should weigh with him against his possession of her, accused him of pride, and even of discontent and a desire to see the world. In short there was a pretty little quarrel, rather more serious than lovers' quarrels generally are, perhaps, yet not serious enough for any word to be spoken of terminating the engagement.

He had gone off with a sore feeling that she did not see how deep and true his love really was, and she was left with a fleeting impression that there are times when a woman must be content to stand aside and let a man's pride have free play.

After a few cool, friendly letters had passed between them, Mildred grew impatient of standing on her dignity, and chose this means of setting all right between them, reading between the lines of her lover's letters, that he, too, only needed the slightest excuse to return, with dignity, to their former footing.

So she sent forth her little packet freighted with love and longing, and waited for his speedy reply.

Months passed, and no word came from him. Mildred counted and recounted the days till there was no longer any doubt, that allowing for every possible and impossible accident he must have received her miniature three months ago, and yet there was no sign from him.

Paler and sadder grew Mildred as the silent days dragged by. Had the wound been deeper than she thought? Had her hasty words slain the love she prized so dearly and someone else become to him what she had once been? She tried to tell herself that she cared naught for love of so slight a nature, but she knew she must always love him, whatever happened.

Then, in October, war was declared, and a new anxiety beset her.

Eustace Elborough, the owner of Crowhurst Park, the adjoining estate, felt his faithful heart racked with pain when he saw how Mildred suffered. For many years he had loved her in a hopeless way, and, having so long put himself out of the question, he honestly wished only to see her happy.

One morning he rode over to see her and say "good-bye," for he was off with the I.Y. to fight the Boers.

"And so," she said sadly, "the last of my friends leaves me. Good-bye, Eustace, good luck and happiness attend you."

"Good-bye, Mildred," he said, holding her hand, and gazing earnestly into her sad face, "if my heart's blood could give you happiness, how gladly would I give it."

"Oh," cried she, her face lighting up with a momentary hope, "perhaps you will hear what has become of him out there. I fear something dreadful must have happened to him. Do, *do* find out for me and let me know."

"Of course I will!" he cried with fervour, quite forgetting for the moment that Africa was a large place, and that he was not going out as a private inquiry agent, but as a soldier.

From time to time he sent her short friendly notes with accounts of the fighting and many of his adventures, and she almost forgot her personal sorrow in sympathy for the general mourning of the country, and the perils of her brave countrymen.

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Then he wrote from Reithock, and the very name stirred her heart with pain.

"We have reached here at last, and the more sanguine say the war is over, but those who know the Boers say differently. I have made all possible inquiries, and have at last found out all there is to learn about poor Rodney. His servants deserted him when war was declared, and his place was one of the first to be destroyed.

"He was rescued and taken in by a family of Boers with whom he had been very friendly, but the household was soon broken up, the horses and men commandeered, and the women-folk scattered. After this I can find no further trace of him, nor of any of the women who might be able to give us some information. You may rest assured I shall continue to make every possible inquiry, but I fear there is no more to learn."

For a time Mildred was overcome by her grief. Surely her beloved Rodney had been killed. But hope which "springs eternal" whispered there were no proofs, and she began to entertain the idea that he was still alive. But why, then, had he not written? He must have received her miniature and pathetic cry for pardon some months before the trouble broke out with the Boers.

Could it be possible he had ceased to love her? Perhaps given his heart to some brave Boer maiden who had succoured him in his need, possibly saved his life? No, no, a thousand times no! Rather would she hear he had died, fighting against the enemy, true to his country and to her.

The war dragged on its weary length, but ended at last, and once more Eustace Elborough stood in the library of the old Manor, war-worn and bronzed, his rugged features, never handsome, had gained the dignity of the man who had looked death in the face, and was not afraid.

Mildred looked older and sadder than when the story began, but the depth sorrow had given to her eyes and the pensive droop to her mouth, in no way detracted from her nameless charm, for the man who was gazing at her with all his soul in his honest blue eyes.

"Indeed, Mildred," he was saying, "there can be no hope, it is nearly three years now since you heard from him, it cannot be that he is still in the land of the living."

"No," said Mildred slowly. "I am sure you are right, and yet—and yet——"

"Make up your mind to it bravely," he said with tender compassion. "Poor Mildred, it will be easier to bear than hugging this forlorn hope to your heart."

"Yes!" she said, "a life-long widowhood, yet never a wife." And she turned away with a sob.

"Oh, Mildred," he cried, seizing her hand, "be my wife. I have loved you for so many years—you are dearer to me than anything in the whole world. Indeed, indeed I would try to make you happy."

"I know you would," she said impulsively, holding out her hand to him, "but, Eustace I am not worth it; my heart is buried out yonder in South Africa."

"Not buried," said Eustace eagerly, holding her thin hand in his warm clasp, "it is only stunned, it will come to life again in the warmth of my love. Mildred"—with a pathetic break in his voice—"I have loved you so long, you do not know what the hope of possessing you means to me."

Mildred was deeply touched. For three years her heart had starved for "the gentle ministering of love," it was no wonder she wished to take this devotion so unreservedly poured out at her feet, and surely she owed something to this good man who had loved her so long and so well. If it would really give him happiness to take her broken life into his keeping, why should she deny it him?

After some minutes' silence, in which she weighed her life and shrank from the barrenness it offered, Mildred at last replied:

"If indeed you really want me, you shall have your wish, but I want you to understand I cannot pretend what I do not feel. You are my old friend and comrade, and I have a warm affection for you, but more—I cannot give—at present."

Poor Eustace paled at her words, but catching at the hope in her last phrase, cried eagerly:

"So you will have me, and let me love you. I ask for nothing more."

And so the engagement was made.

The day before her wedding Mildred received a small, stained packet.

"Another present, I suppose," she thought, as she took it into her hands.

But the sight of the foreign stamp and the postmark "Bloemfontein" caused her to tear it open with trembling fingers.

Behold, some dozen letters on thin paper, and her miniature, the frame wrenched and despoiled of its diamonds, but the poor face still smiling bravely as when she sent it forth to make her peace with her lover.

An official-looking letter headed "Bloemfontein Hospital" caught her eye, and she read as follows:

"To Miss Mildred Dalrymple.

"Madam,—*There has recently died in this hospital one Piet Maas, and before dying he handed me the inclosed packet.*

"*I gathered from what he said that he had been in the service of Mr. Rodney Brookes, an Englishman, and that he had intercepted the inclosed miniature for the sake of its diamonds.*

"*Then, for fear of discovery, he had kept back all the letters on both sides. Not knowing Mr. Brookes' address, I forward the packet to you.—I am, Madam, your obedient servant,*

"H. C. Burton, M.R.C.S."

The letters fell fluttering to the ground as Mildred sank into a chair, half-stunned by the overwhelming rush of thoughts that came over her at this simple explanation of Rodney's silence.

Her first coherent thought was one of joy that her love was exonerated from all blame. He had been true to her, and no doubt also he was still living.

Then eagerly she turned to examine the letters.

There were all her poor pitiful words, begging him to write and relieve her anxiety, and there were all his to her, the least of which would have filled her with joy and thankfulness.

For he also wrote wondering at her silence, and with all his wonted warmth of love that flooded her being with joy.

Then his last letter:

"*How is it there is never a word from you yet, it is three months since I heard. Is it that you cannot forgive me for the foolish words I spoke? Surely, my darling, you know me better than to doubt the real depth and warmth of my love. Still, I am beginning to fear the worst, if I do not get some word from you during the next month I shall go away to fight, and shall care nothing henceforth what becomes of me.*

"*If you no longer love me, I am worth nothing.—Your always loving and devoted,*

"Rodney."

Bitter tears fell and blistered the paper, till a hopeless rage dried them ere they fell.

"That infamous man!" she cried to herself. "How can God permit, that for the sake of a few paltry diamonds, two lives should be ruined? Oh, my love, my love, did you think I could ever cease to love you?

"Perhaps he still lives. His name has never been amongst the killed. I will seek him out, if I spend my last penny in the act—I will find him, and I will say——" And then her glance fell on her wedding-dress, spread out on her bed, in readiness for the morrow, and at the thought of the gallant gentleman whose heart was even now filled with a joyful awe at the thought that to-morrow she would be his, froze the words that had involuntarily burst from her lips.

"But, Eustace! I have pledged him my word, and he has waited with so much love and patience. Rodney may be dead after all. Have I the right to put him to the open shame of a marriage broken off at the eleventh hour, while I spend my youth and my strength in searching for one I may never find? And yet, oh, my love, Rodney, my love, my love!" And she sank sobbing on her bed.

What should she decide to do?

L. Hughes.

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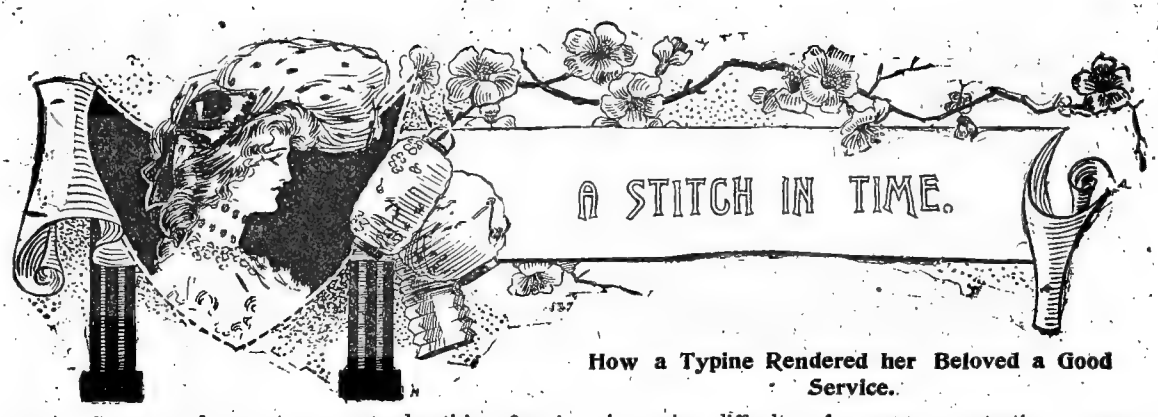

How a Typine Rendered her Beloved a Good Service.

JIMMY CARLESS, ad.-man to a great advertising firm in London, was looking decidedly grumpy. He sat in his room savagely gnawing a stub of pencil, and frowning at an open page of a magazine which lay on the desk before him.

"Read it!" he snapped, jerking the book over to his typine, who sat, notebook in hand, waiting his pleasure.

The girl, with the smile for once absent from her pretty face, took the open magazine, and held it before her. Could Jimmy have seen behind it he would have wondered at the strange expression in her eyes.

"'Puerile!' he called it. 'Tautological twaddle!' The idea of an old curmudgeon who couldn't write an ad. to save his life presuming to criticise my work! By crumbs, Ethel, I tell you, I was riled.

"'What's doubled the sale in the last twelve months?' I asked him.

"'I allow you your due, sir,' he snorted, 'you have done excellent work, but this sort of stuff isn't up to your usual, and what's more, it won't do for me. Take my advice, Carless, and pull yourself together for both our sakes.'

"Now, look here, Ethel," he went on resentfully. "There's my record-book. I ask you, isn't that page as good as anything I've ever turned out?"

The girl walked over to the side-table, and, opening the book, examined the specimen ads. pasted in its pages. An unusual flush was on her cheeks, and she was glad he could not see her face.

Every working day for the past year she had taken down at this man's dictation. As she bent over the book her memory went back to that first day, when, buoyant with optimism and enthusiasm, he had told her what he would do for his firm.

She remembered the verve and ease with which he had produced those early ads.—ingenious and telling every one of them, and crowned with a success that had more than justified all his optimism.

She endeavoured to place that first day when the success of it began to make her proud of working with him, and the close of the working-day only anxious for the next to commence so that she could be with him.

Mechanically she turned the pages. There was a memory attached to every one of those ads. she had pasted in this book so carefully. That one marked the day when he had first addressed her as Ethel, naturally and without any intention of familiarity. This one, the morning when with white face and dark-circled eyes, he had made a laughing reference to his seediness being due to the little card party of the night before with his "pals." She thought, with a pang at her heart, as she still lingered at the page, that this particular ad. marked the day of his degeneration.

For the past three months, as the nightly dissipation sapped his mental power, she had seen him gradually getting more and more incompetent. The fluency of his diction was gone. The snap and virility of his sentences were lacking. A growing indifference resultant on brain-weariness, and the increasing difficulty of proper concentration necessary to evolve novel arguments, had for some time made her fear this day. And now it was here, and he had asked her for her opinion.

"George! How my head spins!" he cried, lying back in his chair. "Would you mind giving me a glass of water? Everything's green!"

The girl gently closed the book and tendered him a glass freshly filled from the filter. He gulped the draught down, and pressed his hand to his aching brow.

"Thanks, Ethel," he said weakly. "You're a good little girl. Had rather a time with the boys last night, you know. Decidedly seedy—and the guv'nor upset me. Tell me, honestly, don't you think the talk's just as convincing, the whole ad. just as telling as anything in the book?"

She looked him straight in the face as he sat gripping the arms of the chair, and a great longing to save him from himself, borne of a deeper feeling than the inherent sympathy of her womanhood, forced the tears to her eyes.

He evaded her gaze, wondering why she did not answer.

"Tell me!" he cried querulously, and, lifting his eyes, he saw the strange look on her white face.

"The criticism was just," she said, firmly.

He started forward at the charge and glared at her incredulously. Had he heard aright? Was it Ethel—his typine—who had uttered the indictment?

"It is true," she said quietly, seating herself at the desk. "Your earlier work was good; there was nothing better. This is but a string of stereotyped platitudes—bald and unconvincing. If you like I will tell you why, but—is it necessary?"

His fingers went to his mouth, and he gazed at her stupidly. His head was swimming. He felt sick and dizzy. It appeared to him as he looked that this girl's accusing face grew and grew until it dominated his vision. Her eyes seemed to sear his brain.

Surely this could not be the same machine-like creature who had sat at his beck for months? It was absurd—an hallucination born of his disordered imagination.

"No; it is not necessary," she continued deliberately, and her voice seemed to come to him from a distance. "But it is very pitiful."

For a space there was no word spoken, and then, suddenly, his two hands went up to his head as the justness of the incrimination forced a groan from his twitching lips.

White-faced and trembling he staggered up and held open the door.

"Thank you, Ethel," he stammered. "Will you please leave me? I will ring for you when I want you."

The girl rose and faced him.

"That page for next month's insertion should go to the electrotyper's to-day," she said.

"Yes, I know," he said shakily. "Thank you."

He closed the door after her, and, stumbling to his chair, sat for quite a long spell gazing blankly before him.

The earnestness of her manner, the half-contemptuous,

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half-pitying look on her face was still with him. "Is it necessary?" A review of the past months passed through his mind; the gambling and drinking until the early hours, the lassitude and physical weariness of the mornings, the growing disinclination for application during the day; and he knew that the accusation was true, the reproach deserved.

He rose, and striding over to the glass, gazed at the reflection of his face. Leaden-eyed, hollow-cheeked and sallow—a pitiful counterfeit of what he had been before that infernal set had trammelled him—he stared dazedly incredulous, and then, as the consciousness of the change in his appearance smote him, he turned away and reviled himself for a fool.

He strode over to the book and feverishly turned the first pages. It was true! Barclay was just in his criticism: the girl was right! He was losing his grip! He was becoming worked out!

The door opened and Thomas Barclay himself intruded his head into the room.

"Carless," he said, shortly, "have you written that copy for next month?"

"Yes—no—I'm on it now," he stammered confusedly.

"Very well," said the chief, "I want to see it before it goes out. Don't forget!"

The significance of his enjoinder was plain, and the face of the ad.-man flushed.

Dropping into his chair he took up again the pencil and stabbed viciously at the paper. His brain was a chaos, absolutely incapable of coherent thought. The knowledge that he was on his trial was wormwood to him. The expression on the girl's white face kept recurring before his mental vision. For an hour he sat, and at the end of it the paper showed but a score of outlined faces—a woman's face that was something very like that of Ethel's.

"Confound everything and everyone!" he cried in his impotence, and he tore the paper into bits and strewed them on the floor. Striding about the office he racked his brain for the original thought that would not come. His incapability maddened him, and drove him to raging at his arbitrary treatment.

"The old idiot should know that the creative faculty can't be forced!" he stormed. "He thinks I'm a machine charged to turn out so much original matter per hour!"

The entrance of the secretary interrupted his railing.

"Hello, Jim; coming out to lunch?" came the cheery invitation.

He muttered a curt negative and flung himself into his seat. The intruder settled his hat on his head and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Go easy, Jimmy, my boy," he said smilingly. "You'll kill yourself. Your brain will never stand the strain. Give it a rest, my boy, and——"

"Get out!" snapped the ad.-man. "Hang you, can't you see you're bothering me?" The man went out whistling.

Another hour went by and the end of it found him still incapable.

He took up an American advertising journal, thinking perchance to catch an idea from the displayed ads. therein. He went through a whole volume, and, at last, stumbled on to a word or two that prompted a headline. Concentrating his mind on the idea it suggested he endeavoured to build up the fabric of an ad., to find, when it was roughed out, that it was but a plagiarism of the one in the book he had gleaned it from. Disgusted, he tore it into shreds. It was useless. His brain seemed paralysed. He would try no more!

Seizing his coat and hat he made for the street. The girl met him in the corridor and her gaze lingered on his white, strained face.

"Ethel," he said hoarsely, "I'm going out. If Barclay asks for that copy you tell him I said he was to write it himself. I've finished!"

Before she could remonstrate he had passed her and was hurrying down the steps. She stumbled to the landing, and involuntarily the faltering whisper slipped from her lips: "Jim—come back!"

He looked up. Over the banister her arms were outstretched to him. Startled at the knowledge that she—the girl who had accused him—wished him to return, for a second he stayed, and then, like a man demented, hurried quickly down into the street. Reckless of consequences he made straightway for the hotel where he knew some of his clique would be playing billiards. They greeted him effusively; a glass of spirits was thurst into his hand, and, presently, duty was forgotten.

After he had gone the girl roused herself and slowly passed into his room. Torn with emotion at the involuntary revelation of her feelings towards him and distraction at his mad action, she sat, her hand pressed to her breast, a prey to mental anguish. What would he think of her? Could she ever face him again?

The step of the chief in the passage roused her to a sense of her surroundings, and she hurriedly thrust a sheet of paper in the machine and commenced to tap out a letter from her notebook. He passed into his sanctum, and her fingers stayed fixed to the keys at the thought that presently he would come to pass the "copy" for that page. If she told him that it was not written, it would be ruin for the man she loved!

She crossed to the desk. The paper on it was blank. She noted the littered floor, and, hardly knowing what she did, she picked up a fragment and gazed at it unseeingly. It was true then. He had not been able to write it! She turned the torn fragment of paper in her fingers, and the scribbled words on it riveted her attention.

It was the headline of the ad. he had attempted to write, and immediately its peculiar aptness struck her. A rush of pertinent phrases suggested by it came into her mind, and she started at the sudden thought that perhaps she could weave a fabric on it that might pass censorship.

The nature of her occupation, the technical knowledge she had acquired of the art, had tempted her in her leisure hours to attempt the production of ads. for many of the specialities she saw advertised, and one or two of her efforts had been bought by the firms to whom she had submitted them. Perhaps she might be able to avert the threatened blow!

Taking a sheet of paper she jotted down the thoughts that crowded into her mind. The phrases came with pleasurable ease. The argument grew and shaped itself; a particularly happy sentence forced a passing smile. She went over it again, deleting, revising, and polishing until, satisfied that further improvement was impossible, she desisted. Only for a moment, however. A feeling of feverish eagerness was upon her to get it finished before the chief should ask for it. Crossing to the machine she quickly typed it.

It was scarcely completed ere the call came. Fighting to control herself, she took up the sheet and carried it to the chief.

"I want Carless and that copy!" he rapped out as she entered the room.

"This is the copy, sir," she said quietly.

He took it from her hand and, adjusting his glasses, went rapidly through it. A succession of expressive grunts came from his lips as he noted the concise and forceful phrasing. A prolonged "A-ah!" came as he appreciated the peculiarly happy touch. At the end of it his face was wrinkled with a queer smile.

"That's good!" he said, and taking his pencil he scribbled his initial in the corner and handed it back to her. "My compliments to Mr. Carless, young lady, and tell him it's approved."

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Somehow—she scarcely knew how—she managed to escape from the room.

"Straight talk's done the youngster good!" said the old man, banging down his rolltop desk. "That's a seller; the best thing he's done for us!"

* * * * *

When Jimmy Carless, miserable and mad at his folly—went down to toy with breakfast next morning, he found a letter by the side of his plate. Wonderingly he opened it, and a sheet of typed "copy" lay in his hand. Wide-eyed he stared at the headline—*his headline*. Eagerly he read it through, and, as he saw the initial in the corner and realised what it meant, the paper dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Pulling himself together with an effort he went out and hurried to the office. The girl was in her place, busy with her machine.

"Ethel," he faltered, striding to her and seizing her two unresisting hands, "you did this for me?"

She looked up at him half-ashamedly, and in her eyes showed a mist of tears. Her hands slipped from his grasp, and shame-facedly he walked over to his desk and dropped his head on his arms.

The folly of the wasted months flooded his being with remorse. In an agony of self-abasement he sat, tortured by the knowledge that this woman knew him for what he was. What a weak fool he must appear in her sight!

And yet, knowing this, she had saved him!

Very slowly he raised his haggard face. She was looking at him with a yearning expression in her eyes that revealed all the love in her heart. In that second he realised why she had done this for him, and his arms went out, involuntarily, towards her.

"Ethel!" he whispered—and could say no more.

"Jim!" she murmured, twining her arms about his neck and crying for very gladness. "You're not angry? I wanted so much to help you——"

"God bless you—Ethel," he faltered. "I am a despicable coward—but you have given me the will to become a man again—will you help me always?"

"Always," she murmured, the love-light shining in her eyes.

"Always, Jim, because I love you."

John J. Armstrong.

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Your Editor Chats.

THE fourth Unsolved Love Problem appears on page 683, and I offer ONE GUINEA for what I consider to be the best solution of the difficulty.

"The Doubt of Mildred Dalrymple" will be an excellent test problem. Surely a more difficult position for a girl to be in could scarcely be imagined, and yet how absolutely possible her position is. It is but another example showing how very careful lovers should be before deciding that their heart's desire has been false to them. Appearances are deceptive, and a girl should have conclusive proofs that her betrothed is not worthy of her love ere she says or does anything likely to hurt his feelings.

The question to be answered is, "What is the Best Course for Mildred Dalrymple to Take?" Replies must be written on one side of the paper only, and should not exceed one hundred words.

The guinea will go to the reader who sends in what I consider to be the best solution. My decision will be final.

Replies should be addressed to "The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.," and must have "Fourth Love Problem" marked in the top, left-hand corner. The very latest date on which I can receive manuscripts is Friday, the 4th of December. None arriving after this day will be considered, but you may send them in as early as you please.

Those who have decided to send in replies in connection with the problem, "The Dilemma of Betty Carteret," must remember that the closing day for that competition is Friday, November 27th.

Next week I hope to announce the winner of the guinea offered for the best solution of "The Awkward Predicament of Edward Clements."

COMING! Coming! It won't be long now! What is coming? Why, our splendid Christmas Number. In three weeks' time it will be published, and there is sure to be a big demand for it.

It will be in every way the best Christmas number of its kind ever produced, and regular readers will be well advised to order their copies early, so as to avoid the possibility of disappointment.

The main feature of the number will be its wealth of fine seasonable fiction, including a splendid story from Mr. W. Pett-Ridge, the author of "Mord Em'ly" and other well-known books.

I SHOULD like to draw my readers' attention to the notice on the third page of this week's cover announcing that the Editor of *The Boys' Leader* is offering a situation worth £100 a year to a boy and a situation worth £100 a year to a girl in the offices of *Pearson's Weekly*, *Short Stories*, *The Boys' Leader*, and other papers. Here is an excellent opportunity for a boy or girl to make a start in life, and if my readers have any juvenile friends it would be doing them a great kindness to call their attention to this magnificent offer.

Your Editor.

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POWERFUL NEW ROMANCE. **START TO-DAY.**

A CRIMINAL MILLIONAIRE

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "Olga Romanoff," "The Lake of Gold," etc., etc.

INTRODUCTION.

CAPTAIN PERCY IDDISON and Lady Maud Hyam, his *fiancée*, are present at an "At Home" given by Lady Medcalf-Mears.

There they meet Isolo Staunton, the lion of the hour, a multi-millionaire, and styled "the modern Monte Christo." The curious feature about him is that, although he is admitted to the very cream of Society, nobody knows his past nor how he accumulated his vast wealth.

Wilfrid Ellerton, a fine young fellow, a worthy son of a worthy father, is also there, and is introduced to Iddison.

The latter notices a remarkable streak of white hair on Ellerton's head, running from the front of the left ear down to the base of the skull.

Isolo Staunton also sees this, but it causes him a great deal more anxiety than it does Iddison.

He knows the cause of that streak! He knows why that white hair is present on the head of one so young! He remembers how, when he was Isolo Zuarez, an escaped convict from the Chincha Islands, he was adrift on the ocean in a small boat, together with a man and a boy.

Isolo had picked up an axe to end the existence of the other man, when the boy, divining his purpose, intervened, and received the weapon on his own head.

They were rescued from their peril—but the blow the boy received had rendered him unconscious of all that had happened.

He had never since remembered.

The question that worries the criminal millionaire as he leaves Lady Medcalf-Mears' house is this—would his memory return?

If it should—what a grim irony of Fate it would be!

Staunton's blood is Spanish, and the ideal for the accomplishment of which he is amassing his many millions is to see Spain reinstated again as Queen of the Seas and Mistress of the East and West!

And now his ideal, his freedom, perhaps his very life hangs on the memory of a mere lad of twenty-three!

If Ellerton remembers the episode on the ocean it will mean, at least, a return to the Chinchas as a convict!

Staunton informs Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, his right-hand friend and confidant, of this awkward coincidence of his meeting Ellerton again, and asks his advice.

Valdez urges Staunton to go to extremes to get Wilfrid out of the way, but Isolo is not willing to compass the boy's death.

Then Don Ramiero advises the millionaire to invite to the millionaire's yacht, the *Isola*, a Society party, for a trip to Norway. Ellerton is to be one of the guests, and during the cruise steps are to be taken for his removal.

Staunton agrees to this and the invitations are sent out. Mercedes, the beautiful, fascinating daughter of the millionaire, is to do the duties of hostess, and among the guests are Captain Iddison and Lady Maud Hyam.

When Mercedes and Ellerton meet, the former recognises the latter as the boy who once rescued her from death in Chili.

The two are drawn together by the bonds of love, and many are the glances that pass between them.

Wilfrid Ellerton, one night, is, by a piece of ingenious trickery, secured and safely imprisoned beneath the decks of the *Isola*.

The rumour is the next morning circulated that he had fallen overboard and been drowned.

When Mercedes hears the news—the glibly spoken lie—she falls fainting to the deck and becomes seriously ill.

In consequence of the alleged accident the ship's company is landed at Leith. But Lady Maud Hyam and her *fiancé* have suspicions of foul play.

Staunton, leaving full arrangements for the disposal of Ellerton, goes personally to break the sad news to the latter's father.

Two nurses are taken on board to tend Mercedes, and one of these is Janet Yuill, who turns out to be the wife of Herbert Darfield, once Arthur Culworth, criminal, and now First Officer on the *Isola*.

The yacht sails away, presumably to the Mediterranean, but it really makes for the regions of the Arctic Ocean.

Suddenly the yacht comes to anchor. Ellerton, unconscious, is put into a small diving-chamber, and accompanied by Ramiero and Captain Durtal.

Then the chamber sinks many fathoms below the sea, and they alight in a most gorgeous underworld, of which Staunton is Lord and Master, where Ellerton is to be kept a prisoner.

M. Herarra, reigning for Staunton in this kingdom under the Seas, receives full instructions as to the manner in which the lad is to be treated.

Ellerton is treated in a most sumptuous manner, and is told that he has had a long illness, and that all his fancies about another world are only dreams.

He, however, realises that he has been the victim of some plot, with what object, of course, he does not know.

Meanwhile, every nation in the world above is staggered by a great financial mystery. Millions of base coins, excellently executed, are flooding the markets.

Stanislaus Smith, the great detective, who is also Herr de Ronski, the famous musician (though none know of his double identity except Arthur Dennison, a Treasury Solicitor) is endeavouring to solve the problem, and he has clues which make him set out for the Riviera, a day or two after the *Isola* drops anchor in the harbour of Monaco.

Stanislaus Smith, *alias* de Ronski, is accompanied by his wife, his daughter Paula, and Dennison.

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SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

A Change of Scene.

"Look here, Staunton, doesn't it strike you that we have been playing this game just a trifle close? It seems to me that we are trying to go straight and crooked at the same time, and if you can show me that that can be done with safety, I guess I shall learn something."

"I quite see what you mean, Kesteven," replied Staunton, leaning back in the easy chair in which he had faced Dr. Billaud and Valdez the night after Wilfrid Ellerton's premature disappearance. "Yes, that's all right as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Of course I admit that if it had not been for that most unhappy occurrence, or, perhaps, I should rather say, friend Ramiero's undue haste in arranging the accident, a good deal of the trouble could have been saved.

"But then you see I put the thing to the test. Billaud performed the operation and the fellow's memory came back.

"You must see that when the experiment had succeeded—although I would have given a hundred thousand for it to have failed—still, when he *did* remember, what was there to be done except what I did—what I had to do? You don't suppose that I was going to give myself, and the work of a dozen years, and all that I have been hoping for into the hands of a mere boy, who could either put me back where I was on the Chinchas or have me hanged or garrotted? No, no, it is done now, and it has got to remain as it is. I am sorry, bitterly sorry, I confess, but there is no help for it as far as I can see."

"Yes, yes," said Kesteven, the millionaire's partner in his great schemes. "From the personal point of view perhaps you are right, but you see there are other things."

"Political and diplomatic? Yes, that's a sort of risk that we have been taking all along, and, as far as I can see, we have got to go on taking. Of course, if you have any workable alternative to propose, I shall be very glad to hear of it."

"I am afraid you have got me there, chiefly for the reason that you don't seem to have left any alternative possible. You see it looks as though this Ellerton affair is to have awkward consequences. His father took your version of the tragedy in good faith, but, to my idea, it was rather a difficult sort of thing to swallow, and I certainly think that Valdez might have arranged it a little more scientifically. That 'man overboard' idea was a bit thin, you know, in a smooth sea like that—and it doesn't seem to be quite believed."

"What!" exclaimed Staunton. "Who doesn't believe it?"

"Well," said Kesteven, "I had a chat with our mutual friend Morton up in the grounds of the Casino this morning, and he seemed to think that some of your guests on this boat were not quite convinced as to the accuracy of the tragedy."

"What! How can that possibly be?" said Staunton testily. "I still think that if ever a disappearance was properly arranged that was, although, of course, I admit that Valdez did complicate matters terribly by hurrying things as he did. You know I have only too good reason to say that."

"Now look here, Staunton," Kesteven said, "you are just trying to talk round the facts instead of getting at them. We won't say anything about what happened on this yacht a few days ago. That is a matter personal to yourself, but I must remind you that there are other things and pretty big ones too hanging to this business."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Staunton impatiently, "that, of course, is understood. What I want to know now is what you mean by the suspicions you are connecting with Morton and which seem to be troubling you so much. What are they? For my own part, I cannot see how there could have been any suspicions, I mean, in the way of what, between ourselves, we might perhaps call foul play."

"Well, for one thing, young Morton seems to have got pretty confidential with my daughter Cora. He has been doing very well lately, thanks to us, and I have an idea that he would not have much objection about marrying into the family. So naturally Cora, who's about smart enough to buy him at one end of this yacht and take him to the other and sell him and make dollars on him, wasn't long in finding out that he had been hearing something."

"And that?"

"Well, you know that two of your guests on this boat at that unfortunate time were Lady Maud Hyam and Captain Percy Iddison. Now Iddison happens to have a younger brother who is second-in-command of a British Destroyer called the *Scorcher*. I need hardly tell you that of all the intelligence agencies in the world the British Navy is about the most complete.

"These men don't talk much, but they put in a lot of time thinking. When you landed your guests at Leith one of the first things Captain Iddison did was to communicate with his brother and the result was that within forty-eight hours of the accident, there was not a man on the British North Sea Squadron, which his boat was attached to, who believed it could have happened without the body being found. Every set of the tides and currents all round the compass were known to them. They kept the wires from Calais to Trondjhem hot. Steamers were sent out to the fishing fleet on the Dogger Bank, and revenue cutters and all sorts of craft got wandering about trying to pick up information about this lost son of a millionaire.

"You see you cannot get away with the son of one of the best known men in England without having a considerable amount of trouble made out of it, and the result seems to be that——"

"That this story is not quite believed? Is that what you mean?" exclaimed Staunton angrily. "But even if it is not believed, how is anything else going to be proved? If Morton gives that sort of gossip away to your daughter, as I suppose he did in a way that those young idiots will do when they think they have fallen in love with a girl——"

"You seem to forget that we have both got daughters, and that——" said Kesteven sharply.

"Yes, yes, I beg your pardon—and your daughter's too," replied Staunton, leaning his elbow on the arm of the chair and putting his hand to his forehead. "You must forgive me, Kesteven. This extraordinary development has quite upset me."

"Well," said Kesteven, rising and looking at his watch, as though he too had had enough of the subject for the present, "I don't know that you're to be blamed for that. It has been a most unfortunate business—one of those miserable little businesses which the Fates sometimes seem to start out with to smash up the biggest enterprises. Still we must just keep our eyes skinned, and take our luck in this as we have done in other things. And now what's the matter with dressing for dinner? It will do us good to forget all about the old Underworld for a bit, and just remember that we're in a lot wickeder and pleasanter place. Besides, we're going to hear de Ronski to-night, and I reckon that ought to help a bit."

"Yes, you're right there," said Staunton, whose one passion, outside his ambitions and love of power, was music—"we haven't too much time and if there's any magic that can charm evil thought away it is de Ronski's. And that daughter of his is going to make a sort of *début* to-night at the Salle des Concerts. I am told that she is very beautiful and sings like an angel."

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"Cora's just wild about her," replied Kesteven, "she heard her at a private sing-song, in Dresden, I think it was, about six months ago, and she avows there'll be nothing like her in Europe in a year or two."

* * * * *

It was the famous musician's first recital of the season.

Staunton, with his party, which considered of Mercedes, Cora and her father, Don Ramiero, and Doctor Billaud, with the Honourable Reginald in almost constant attendance, occupied a box to the right in the grand tier. In the box immediately opposite to them they were rather surprised to see Lord and Lady Medcalf-Mears, and Lady Maud Hyam, who had accepted her ladyship's chaperonage as a very easily earned social license for a trip to the Riviera with her Captain of Engineers, who was sitting beside her. There was another man in the box, obviously an Englishman.

It was not, after all, a very strange coincidence under the circumstances. The abrupt conclusion of the trip in the *Isola* had left the little party without any plans, and, as Lady Maud's father and mother had meanwhile gone to Homburg for the cure, and Lady Maud happened to cordially detest the place and the cure alike, it was only natural that they should seek a relieving contrast from the melancholy circumstances of their last pleasure-trip in another to the autumn Holiday Land of Europe.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mercedes, when she had settled herself in her seat and taken a preliminary look through her lorgnette over the audience, "look, there is Lady Maud, and, of course, Captain Iddison. Yes, and Lord and Lady Medcalf-Mears, too, but who is the other gentleman? Do you know him, papa?"

Her father put his glasses up and looked across the house.

"No, I can't say that I do," he replied, "at least, I don't locate him, though his face does seem familiar to me. Still, one does meet such a lot of people. Morton, do you know him?"

It was, of course, the Honourable Reginald's duty, part of the work he was paid for, in fact, to know more or less intimately, everybody who was worth knowing, so he replied immediately:

"Oh, yes, that's Arthur Dennison, nephew of *the* Sir William Dennison, you know, or, as he is a good deal better known, Lord Justice Dennison, the great criminal judge. Dennison's father was, as it happened, one of the first criminal lawyers, perhaps *the* first until he died about four years ago, I think, Arthur, the man over there, has followed in his father's footsteps, and is now recognised as about one of the smartest men they have in the Solicitor's Department at the Treasury.

"Thanks," said Staunton. "I think I must have met him somewhere. Do you know him personally? Is he a decent sort of fellow?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "I've known him for some years. We're fellow bachelors, and he's as good a fellow as one would wish to know. By the way, he is one of a good many people in Europe who are deeply interested in the great Silver Problem. Of course, I don't mean bi-metallism, but the other much more interesting question which, I suppose, some of the monarchs of finance would also be very glad to solve."

"The great Silver Problem?" said Cora Kesteven, looking round at him with a glance which had already become for him almost irresistible. "The great Silver Problem—why, what's that? Do tell me. We come from out West, you know."

"I reckon that'll have to keep, Cora," interrupted her father, "there's the overture beginning."

"And, after all," murmured Morton, bending slightly over Cora's chair, "it is really only a question that troubles financiers and other people in the City."

"Quite so," said Staunton, with a meaning which only one person in the box understood, "and now let us listen to the music, which, I expect, will be much more interesting."

As regards the concert, it will be enough to say here that there was not one of the numbers that did not completely fulfil the party's expectations, and more than satisfied the demands of what happened to be, just at that time, one of the most critical audiences in Europe. During the fifteen minutes' interval, visits were exchanged between the two boxes, and when the concert was over the two parties met in the vestibule, Staunton took the opportunity of saying to Lady Medcalf-Mears, with an expression which sounded to her perfectly genuine:

"I trust that the very painful circumstances under which we were compelled to part at Leith will not make it impossible for you and your party to give Mercedes and myself the pleasure of receiving you on board the *Isola* during our stay here? I am going to be daring enough to attempt to persuade M. de Ronski and his wife and daughter to be our guests on one of these moonlight nights that are coming, and, if so, we will run out to sea a little way, and have a moonlit marine-concert all to ourselves."

"Of course," replied Lady Medcalf-Mears, who had not the slightest intention of ruffling her latest lion, or taking undue sorrow to herself because a deplorable accident had happened to a mutual acquaintance. "We shall be delighted to come. What happened was very terrible indeed, but, after all, it was the purest mischance, and, well, naturally, there is the end of it. Your idea as to the concert is quite delicious if you can only carry it out, master of millions and all as you are. You know, de Ronski is a most peculiar man even for a genius. But stop, what am I thinking about? My friend, in fact, my connection, Mr. Dennison, has the honour of knowing him personally, and he is going to introduce us all. Of course, that would be the easiest way to manage it!"

"Once again you have made me your debtor, Lady Medcalf-Mears," said Staunton. "Then if you will all come to lunch to-morrow on board, where I think we can treat you a little better than these wretched hotels and restaurants do, and bring Mr. Dennison as one of the party, perhaps we might be able to arrange matters. I am a thousand times obliged to you."

It was a lovely night, and when the two parties had taken leave of each other to walk back to their quarters,

"Well, Maud, and what do you think of the fair Mercedes?" asked Iddison, when they had got clear away from the crowd. "She seems to have got over the shock wonderfully, considering how severe it must have been."

"As regards her general health, she undoubtedly has," replied Lady Maud in a somewhat subdued voice, "but in one way it has certainly affected her very seriously."

"Oh, I am very sorry to hear that! What is it?"

"Why," continued Lady Maud, "would you believe that, when I was talking to her about her illness, I was amazed to find that she is utterly ignorant of what had caused it, and Miss Kesteven said to me afterwards that everything connected with poor Mr. Ellerton's disappearance is, for the present at least, utterly wiped out of her memory."

"Just as well, perhaps," replied Iddison, with a gentle pressure on her arm, the meaning of which she fully understood.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Tangling Threads.

EARLY the next morning, in fact, as they were going for their dip in the sea, Dennison said to Iddison:

"I think I ought to tell you that, quite involuntarily, I overheard what Lady Maud said to you about Miss Staunton's illness as we were coming away from the concert. I mean about that curious obliteration of memory with regard to poor Wilfrid Ellerton's disappearance. You were on board at the time, and if you can tell me anything more of the circumstances, and feel at liberty to do so, I shall be glad."

"I don't know that I can tell you very much," replied

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Iddison, not very cordially, "because, as you see, after all it was a private party, and I don't——"

"No, I know you don't, my dear fellow," interrupted he of the quicker intellect, "and that just tells me that you do, I mean that you do know something that I should like you to tell me. But you know there is honour even in the Solicitors Department of the Treasury. As a matter of fact, we are the most honourable set of officials in the world. Even our lawful prey sometimes admit that. Therefore I will be quite candid with you. I and one or two others of a similar mental turn, don't quite see how that accident could, well, what shall I say——"

"You have said quite enough, Dennison," interrupted the other, looking round at him, "Now you must tell me whether you asked me that question officially or just as a friend?"

"As both," replied Dennison, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I see what you mean," said the soldier, "and I don't see why you shouldn't know anything that I know; wherefore, I don't mind admitting that I thought that in some respects it was a very extraordinary sort of occurrence. It was this way, you see—"

And then he gave him an account of what had happened on the *Isola*, so far as he knew the facts, and he ended with confidence—

"And now I am going to answer your first question; but this, of course, is quite between ourselves, because it was really Maud who found it out."

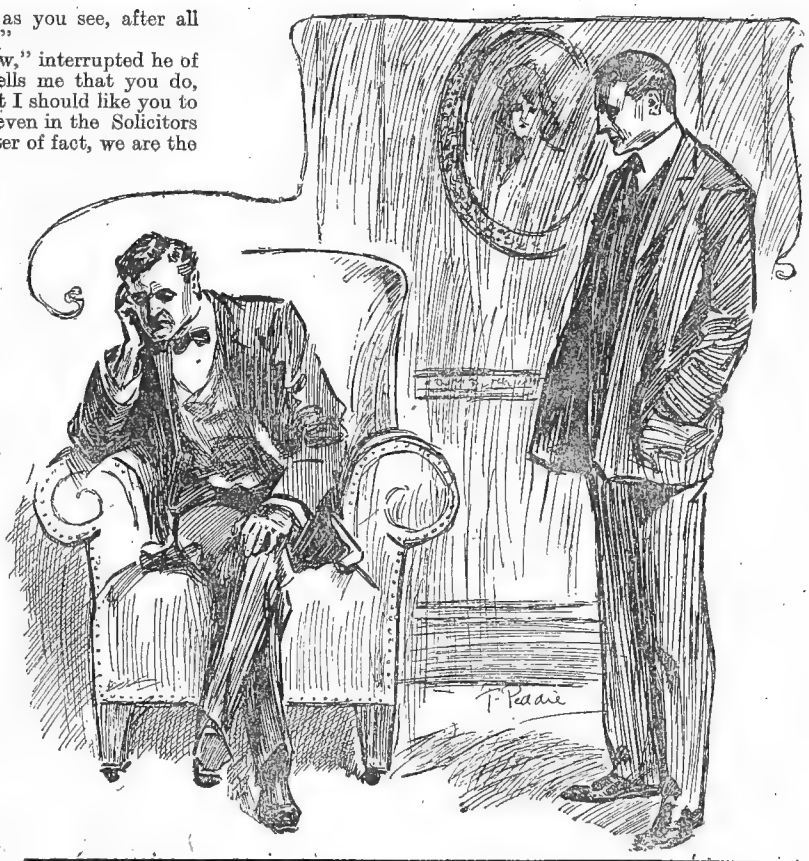
"Then I will promise not to use it without your consent and Lady Maud's. Will that do?"

"Of course," replied Iddison, well knowing that only one of those consents would be necessary. "The reason for Miss Staunton's unhappy lapse of memory which you heard Maud speak of last night is really this. She and Ellerton had met under rather tragic circumstances when they were boy and girl in Peru. Mr. Staunton was out there a good bit, I believe. It was at a seaside place called Chirillos, during the war between Chili and Peru, and the Chilians were bombarding the place. He saved her from a shell by jumping into the sea with her before it burst, and taking her ashore when the damage had finished.

"It was a rather early introduction, but it, or love at first sight, or both, seemed to have done all that was wanted. As soon as Maud found out the real state of affairs, she, being an engaged girl, naturally entered into a conspiracy with me to get another girl engaged, I suppose, just as married women seem to want to get other women married, and the result was that they came to a complete understanding.

"There can't be any doubt whatever about poor Miss Staunton's love, for the moment she heard next morning of Ellerton's falling overboard, she fell on to the deck at her father's feet, sobbing out something in Spanish which no one could catch. Perhaps her father understood the words, and perhaps they told her story. That, of course, no one knows, but it is a fact that she has forgotten everything that happened between her and Ellerton up to that moment. She remembers him as a guest on the yacht, and she has been told since that he was lost overboard. That, at least, was what Mr. Staunton told Lady Medcalf-Mears, who, as you know, was on board the yacht with us at the time."

"Quite so. Thanks very much, Iddison. Poor girl! What a pity! Beauty—millions—found the man she loved and wanted—and lost him inside forty-eight hours! A tragedy in more senses than one. Well, here we are. Let us enjoy ourselves while we may."



"Well," said Kesteven, the partner of Staunton in his great schemes, "It has been a most unfortunate business."

Arthur Dennison put in a good deal of thinking while he was somewhat lazily enjoying himself in the warm, clear water of the Bay. True, the conversation would not have appeared very important to a third party not personally interested in the subject, but to him it meant a good deal, so much so that he there and then determined on a step which he would not have thought of taking twenty-four hours before.

He declined an invitation to breakfast with Lady Medcalf-Mears' party on the ground of a prior engagement, dressed quickly, but with all his usual care, and drove out to Cimiez. Arrived at the Grand Hotel, he sent his card up to M. de Ronski's rooms, and was presently invited to give himself the trouble of ascending.

"Welcome, if unexpected—indeed, the more so on that account," de Ronski said as they shook hands. "Of course, you will stay to breakfast—an early one, nine o'clock—for, between ourselves, a mutual friend of ours, a Mr. Smith, has a good deal of business to do before I shall be ready to obey the command of His Highness the Prince to play to-night at the Palace at Monaco. But I am delighted that you have come. If not I think I must have sent for you. Sit down and light a cigarette. The ladies will put in an appearance very soon. Meanwhile excuse me for a moment."

He was back in a few moments with a little portfolio in his hand. He sat down and opened it with a key attached to his watch chain, and took out a photograph, which he handed to Dennison, saying, in Mr. Smith's usual voice:

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"Do you recognise that face—I mean, do you think that you have seen it lately?"

Dennison, as is necessary for anyone who succeeds in his profession, had an involuntary and practically infallible memory for faces. They instantly associated themselves in his mind with places and circumstances, though not always with names. He looked at the somewhat faded and old-fashioned photograph for about half a minute, and then he gave it back, and said:

"It has all the features and expression of a man I was introduced to last night in Mr. Staunton's box. Younger, I should say, by about ten years. Beard and moustache fuller and darker; hair ditto and thicker, but probably the same man. But what is the matter? If I am right, what is he doing in this photographic gallery of yours—for I suppose that comes out of the unique collection of our mutual friend?"

"If you are right, as I think and most sincerely hope you are," replied Mr. Smith's voice, "there will shortly be something very serious the matter.

"That is a photograph, taken unawares, of one Pedro Ramierez, who was so strongly suspected of complicity in that mysterious silver swindle in the West Indies which worried us so much about ten years ago that he was arrested and even committed for trial. Nothing, however, could be positively proved, though the moral assumptions were very strong, and in the end the jury stopped the case somewhat abruptly, and of course he was discharged. I may add that some members of that jury seemed to make money with singular rapidity during the next few months.

"Bribery and corruption, I believe, are no more impossible there than they are any nearer home, if scientifically administered. Of course I remember that swindle, though I was only just beginning then. It was practically identical with the present one, only on a microscopic scale. The natural deduction would be that there is some connection between them.

"And I have some hopes that this may prove to be a link in the chain. This, I believe, to be also the photograph of Don Ramiero Valdez y Valdivia, whom you met in Mr. Staunton's box last night. He is very closely associated with him in business affairs, and, socially, they are almost inseparable.

"Curiously enough also," Mr. Smith continued, taking a bank-note out of the portfolio, "this thousand-franc note, which has been passed under the microscope during the night and found *not* to contain the new mark, though it is only dated two months back, was changed by the said Don Ramiero to pay for Mr. Staunton's box. In fact, all the money taken at the office has been submitted to a most rigid examination. That, I may say in confidence, is one of the reasons why our friend de Ronski began his season here."

"Well, I'm—all admiration!" exclaimed Dennison, who might perhaps have said something more forcible had not the door opened just at that moment.

"Good morning, Madame de Ronski; good morning, Miss Paula," he continued, getting up and shaking hands. "Allow me to offer my unspeakable thanks for what you gave us last night. That is a little illogical, but you see what I mean."

"Of course," said Paula with a laugh, which even now he could not help thinking more musical than her singing. "That is very kind of you, and I am glad you were pleased. But, ah, here is something more interesting than compliments, she went on, going to the table and taking up the photograph, "and so you and papa have been having a professional talk?"

"Yes," replied Dennison. "I came up to see M. de Ronski."

"Otherwise Smith," murmured the owner of both names, "and I have been rude enough to ignore the possible purpose of his visit. That, I must confess, is both socially and professionally, very bad etiquette. Dennison, I owe you an apology. You didn't come here for nothing at this time in the morning. What was it? Speak as plainly as you like. We are quite by ourselves—and, to some extent, as we said before, conspirators together."

"Please, Mr. Dennison!" said Madame de Ronski, as she and Paula sat down and looked expectant.

"It isn't much," he replied, "but I thought that it may mean something later on if not now—and from what I have just heard, it will be rather now than later. Unhappily, I cannot give the particulars even to you just now, but I know that you will trust me for those.

"I came to ask M. de Ronski," he went on, laying a stress on the name, "whether he would allow me to introduce Captain Percy Iddison, of the Engineers, an old friend and schoolfellow of mine, to his confidential acquaintance; and, secondly, whether Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle de Ronski would be willing to accept an invitation to dine and spend an hour or two in a moonlight cruise on board Mr. Isolo Staunton's yacht?"

"And you say that that isn't much!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, with his own voice and manner, and an unwonted amount of emotion in his tone. "Why, my dear Dennison, it may be very much; it may, indeed, be a considerable part of everything. Yes, I think we will—well—make it our business in both senses to accept the invitation. As regards your friend, there can be no question whatever about that, except this; which of my two selves do you wish him to know?"

"Both, if you have no objection," replied Dennison seriously. "I have reasons for asking this. He is a soldier and a gentleman, which means, of course, that he would die any kind of death rather than betray a confidence."

"I fully understand you. Let us make his acquaintance, and, if possible, let us become friends as soon as you wish."

"Why not lunch, say, two o'clock?" interrupted Madame de Ronski, by way of adroit acquiescence. "That will give Mr. Dennison time to have a little breakfast with us—it must be quite ready now, and to go back and bring his friend here comfortably."

"Very sorry, Madame, but we're both engaged for lunch on the yacht to-day. To-morrow, of course, we shall be delighted."

And so it was arranged, entirely to Dennison's satisfaction. During breakfast all reserve was thrown aside, and they talked quite freely as "conspirators" on the subjects which interested them most for the moment, and when he went away he left behind him an intelligently sincere desire to know more of Captain Percy Iddison.

It so happened that when he got back into town the first Englishman he met was Iddison himself. But he was walking along the sea-front with a tall, and, as it seemed to him at the first glance—which is mostly correct—handsome, almost beautiful, woman in the costume of a nurse. He raised his Panama, and was going on his way, when Iddison exclaimed:

"Ah, there you are, Dennison. The very man we were talking about. Let me introduce you to Miss Janet Yuill. We have just found each other again. She was at the front with Ours in the war. Right through it almost. We used to call her "Sister Janet" then, for she was a sister to the whole lot of us, and some of her brothers were rather hard bargains I can tell you. And now, as the Fates will have it, she turns out to be one of the nurses that Mr. Staunton engaged at Leith to nurse his daughter. That's why she's here, of course. She has been telling me a story—which I already have her permission to tell you—that I would hardly have believed from anyone else."

"And that?" asked Dennison, as he shook hands somewhat informally with "Sister Janet." "Please let me have it. You can hardly have too much of a good thing, and it seems to me as though I were going to have quite an interesting day—as I will explain later on. I am just in the humour to listen to wonders."

"I hardly know whether you will consider this a wonder or not, Mr. Dennison," said the nurse, with a quiet yet meaning smile; "but I have just been telling Captain Iddison in all good faith that fifteen nights ago I saw the snow-cap of Mount Hekla in Iceland from the deck of Mr. Staunton's yacht."

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There was no doubting the truth of the eyes which looked into his as she said this, but for all this he could not help exclaiming:

"Mount Hekla, fifteen nights ago! And here you are in the Mediterranean! Well, since it is true, it must be a miracle of some sort, and therefore——"

"Exactly," added Iddison, "there is a very considerable 'therefore' connected with the story as far as I can see."

EIGHTEENTH . . CHAPTER.

Beginning a New Life.

When Ellerton woke for the second time in the new abode into which he had been so mysteriously taken, he felt, even while he was wondering at the strangeness of his surroundings, that something had happened to him in the mental as well as in the physical sense.

How this amazing change had come about was for the present quite beyond his comprehension. So far as he could see, he had been suddenly translated from one world into another.

But, apart from this mystery, there was something else which he recognised as a change within himself. Somehow his brain seemed a little different in its working. His intellect was clearer and stronger than he seemed to remember it before this strange transition had taken place. His memory, too, seemed to have been curiously lengthened, for he not only distinctly remembered certain episodes in his life, notably the tragedy of the whale-boat, but his recollection of everything seemed very much clearer than it had been before.

So much, at least, he owed, albeit unconsciously, to the last scruples of the man who had banished him from the upper world, and to the surgical skill of Dr. Billaud.

He looked from one to the other of the three girls, wondering how on earth he could have got into such strange company. They were totally unlike the women of the world which he had left. They were beautiful, but with a beauty which seemed so unreal that he regarded them rather as the phantoms of a dream than as creatures of human flesh and blood.

And where was Mercedes? How far had this evil miracle which had befallen him, removed him from her, just as he had begun to taste the sweetest delight that the Fates can give to man?

His crowding thoughts were agonising enough to have driven a weaker man towards the verge of insanity, but Wilfrid Ellerton had too many generations of hard-headed ancestors behind him for that.

Herarra had purposely placed him in the most magnificent surroundings that his submarine domain could afford. It was his design to intoxicate his senses so completely that he would, as weaker men might have done, accept the conditions of his new existence, if not without question at least with easy-going content.

Instead of that, his strong common-sense, reinforced as it was by the all-absorbing love which had for the first time come into his life, caused him to take an entirely different view of his new surroundings, and as he lay there on the couch gazing half-dreamily about him, he came quickly to the conclusion that, for the present at least, it would be best for him to consider himself as having been translated by some unknown means into a totally strange state of existence.

He would be an explorer in a hitherto unknown country, which might perhaps contain many marvels for him, and as such ready to make the best of it. He was not of the sort that gives up hope easily, and, wherever he might be, the last thing that he intended to despair of was solving the mystery which surrounded his present condition, and, by some means or other, returning to the world in which Mercedes was waiting for him.

As his intellect cleared and became active again his physical strength returned. He stretched his limbs out on the divan and then he sat up and, as it were, looked at himself.

He was dressed exactly as he had been on that memorable night on board the yacht. It struck him as almost comically odd that he should be sitting there in this strangely splendid apartment in exactly the same dinner-suit in which he had sat down to dine, and in which he had taken that moonlight walk on deck afterwards with Mercedes.

And then these girls, who were they? Why should they be standing by the side of the couch fanning him and bathing his forehead with scent, as though he were some Oriental potentate?

"May I ask who you young ladies are, and why you should be taking all this trouble about me?" he said rather abruptly, as he rose to his feet.

He looked at Brenda as he said this, and added:

"But I beg your pardon, but perhaps you don't speak English in this place, wherever it is."

Considerably to his surprise, and also not a little to his embarrassment, they all three crossed their hands before them, and bowed as slaves might have done before their master, then Brenda replied, in her quaint English, like a child repeating a newly-learnt lesson:

"Lord, it was the will of the Master that we should attend upon you. We are his servants and therefore we do his bidding, and we are commanded to do yours."

There was a touch of abject submission in her tone and bearing which irritated him, and he replied almost roughly:

"Well, then, if that is so, will you be good enough to go and find this master, whoever he is, and tell him that I should like to have a talk with him. Is he the man who was sitting here before I went to sleep again?"

"Yes, Lord," replied Brenda, looking up at him with vague astonishment in her big blue eyes. "Your bidding shall be done." She moved away to walk towards the curtained entrance, and he turned to the other two, and said:

"I needn't keep you young ladies any longer either. I am quite well now, and I want to be alone until this Master, as you call him, comes."

They bowed again, and followed Brenda in silence, and he put his hands in his pockets, and began to walk up and down the room, saying to himself:

"Well this is a confoundledly curious business; however it has all come about. Certainly there is some infernal mystery about it. Whatever happened to me on board the yacht, and it must have been something pretty serious, I should fancy, it made me insensible for some time, goodness knows how long. Then I wake up and find myself here—which isn't saying very much, seeing that I haven't the remotest notion where I am. Now it's quite obvious that this cannot possibly have happened, first without some object in getting me out of the way; and, secondly, without the knowledge and consent of Mr. Isolo Staunton.

"Isolo, Isolo, surely I have heard that name before, and now I come to think of it, his face, that reddish-brown, Scottish hair, and those big, deep Spanish eyes of his.

"Good Lord, of course, he was one of the men in that boat which I had forgotten all about and remembered again so curiously after I had been ill on board the yacht!

"Well, that clears up a good deal of the mystery, I suppose, if it really is so. If that's so he must have wanted to get rid of me, and Valdez and the doctor helped him to do it—and they did it the very night that Mercedes had given me the greatest happiness that I could have wished for! What a ghastly complication! Well, there must be some way out of it, and as that way also leads to Mercedes, I am going to find it."

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At this moment his speculations were interrupted by the entrance of Herarra and a tall, well-dressed, handsome, but somewhat masculine woman.

"Ah, my dear Señor," said Herarra, with a gesture of pleasure, "I am delighted to see that you have so far recovered. Permit me to present, or perhaps I should re-present, you to my wife—that is, of course, unless you have also recovered from the strange lapse of memory which so unhappily caused you to forget us."

"I am afraid, Señor, that I cannot yet lay claim to the pleasure of remembering you nor yet the Señora," replied Ellerton, returning the lady's bow somewhat stiffly, but speaking in a tone of perfect good humour. "However, since that is so, we shall have to make the best of it. Therefore, perhaps it will be as well if I consider myself a stranger in this somewhat strange land, and you and the Señora, as my host and hostess, at any rate, for the time being."

"Under the circumstances, my dear Señor Ellerton, that will undoubtedly be the course most pleasant to all of us," replied Herarra, even more cordially than before. His involuntary guest was not a little astonished to find that he knew his name, but he had made up his mind to take everything, no matter how extraordinary, just as it came, and so he replied:

"Very well, then, as I am a complete stranger and your guest, I suppose I shall not be trespassing too far on your kindness and hospitality, tell me where I am, and afterwards enable me to explore this new abode, which now seems quite unknown to me."

"Since you seem to have so completely forgotten it, Señor," said the lady, who was not only Herarra's wife, but, at one time, his most daring and successful accomplice, "I think we can promise you some very interesting discoveries—in short, nothing less than the discovery of a new world."

"Yes," added Herarra, going towards the table on which the wine and the glasses stood, "and as we are agreed to look upon your return to health in that way, let us welcome our guest in a glass of wine."

He opened the bottle and poured out three glasses, and handed one to his wife and one to Ellerton. Ellerton recognised clearly that, since he was obviously in the power of these people he could only do himself harm by any appearance of unfriendliness, and so he drank to his own welcome and thanked his host and hostess—or gaolers, as the case might be—and probably was—with a cordiality which was excellently well assumed.

Herarra had been given clearly to understand that his guest was to be looked upon as a prisoner for life and, as no escape from the Underworld was considered possible, both he and his wife were prepared to take a certain amount of pleasure in revealing some of its secrets to him with perfect candour. Thus, when Ellerton turned to the Señora and complimented her on the strange beauty of her handmaids, thanking her for giving him such charming attendants in his illness, she replied, with a look at her husband:

"Ah, Señor, that thing alone shows how completely you have forgotten, for surely such beauty as Brenda's would be the last thing that a man of your age would forget. Besides, it is not long since you were such very good friends that we all thought you were going to become something more."

"Whoever this lady is," was Ellerton's indignant mental comment, "she is certainly a most excellent liar."

But he said aloud:

"As you say, I really must have forgotten completely if I have forgotten that. She is very beautiful. You mean, I presume, the eldest of the three. The other two are scarcely less so. But at present I must confess that their beauty hardly interests me. But now, who are they?"

"That," she replied, dropping into a broad low armchair, "is a question to answer which we should have to tell a whole history—one which you used to know——"

"Another lie," thought Ellerton, "a more elaborate one this time, I suppose. Still, I may as well hear it."

Then he went on aloud as he accepted a cigar from Herarra:

"Perhaps at the same time it will be none the less interesting to me now, and so if there is time I can promise you an attentive listener."

"There will be plenty of time before dinner, Mirella," said her husband. "It is nearly an hour yet, and so if you wish to tell the story I know you can do it better than I could."

"Very well," she said, "then I will tell it."

And she began to tell him the strange and well-nigh incredible story of the coming of the remnants of the Viking expedition from the Far West into the Underworld.

She told how they were driven, starving, on to the coast of Iceland many generations ago, and how the inhabitants, not having too much food for themselves and wanting no new settlers with hungry mouths to feed, tried to drive them away.

This the sea-rovers resisted and took what they wanted by force of arms until the Icelanders came upon them in such numbers that they were defeated in a battle and those that were left of the men, women, and children were forced to take refuge in a great cavern or crevice leading down into the heart of a mountain. The Icelanders were afraid to attack them here and so built fires across the entrance and kept a strict guard over it.

The invaders were almost driven to the point of surrender when there came a convulsion of the earth and the inner end of the great cavern was burst open and they were able to retreat still further. They lit the torches and lamps which they had brought with them and they made their way into a succession of still vaster caverns, and while they were doing this there came another shudder of the earthquake and closed the rocks again behind them, thus inclosing them for ever within the bowels of the earth.

"By what miracle some of them survived under such terrible circumstances," said the Señora when she had reached this stage of the story, "can never be known, for their descendants have almost forgotten even the first traditions, but some must have done so and accustomed themselves to these almost impossible conditions.

"They no doubt found subterranean rivers with fish in them for they and the fish are here now, and vegetables of some sort, for there were also animals which fed upon them. They must also have discovered or invented a source of light, for it would seem that the more completely they, as it were, conquered their new realm, the more their sight, which had been almost lost during a few generations of darkness, came back, and so their children's children are able to see again. Thus they continually improved their condition, in what they truly called in their old speech, the Underworld.

"That, Señor, is the legend or the history of the ancestors of the original people of the region which once you knew so well and have now apparently forgotten. The rest, I think, I had better leave to my husband to tell you. I must go now."

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

. . A Recognition. . .

THE departure of the Señora was a distinct relief to Ellerton, who was one of those perhaps excessively chivalrous men who find it impossible to be anything like rude, or even to speak quite plainly in the presence of any woman, friend or enemy, which latter he now felt pretty certain his hostess must be.

He took a sip at his glass and a pull at his cigar with a deliberation which was not quite pleasing to his host, and then he turned on him quickly and said in a tone which he liked still less:

"I have been deeply interested in all that I have heard so far, Señor—pardon me, you know my name—may I ask for 'the favour of yours' and at the same time some indication

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of the position which fortune has given to you in this world to which I have returned from my forgetfulness? Miss Brenda referred to you, in what I can only honestly call a somewhat servile manner, as the Master."

"I can, under the circumstances, be nothing else than quite frank with you," replied the other, between the puffs of his cigar, what time Ellerton waited, as he thought, for the next lie. "My name is Leon Herarra" ("May I be kicked hard, if I didn't think it was. The man Dad just missed catching over the forging of those Bilbao Iron share certificates," was Ellerton's mental comment) "and I have the honour to be the ruler of these regions to which, as you have justly put it, you now return."

There was a distinct menace in the tone, rather than in the words, which it was impossible for Ellerton to mistake, but he took no visible notice of it and said without a trace of emotion in his voice:

"Thank you. And now may I ask by what means the Señora and yourself and myself, who are evidently not of the same race as the descendants of those old Vikings of whose advent the Señora spoke so eloquently, got into this Underworld, as I believe they called it. We can hardly have come by the same way that they did?"

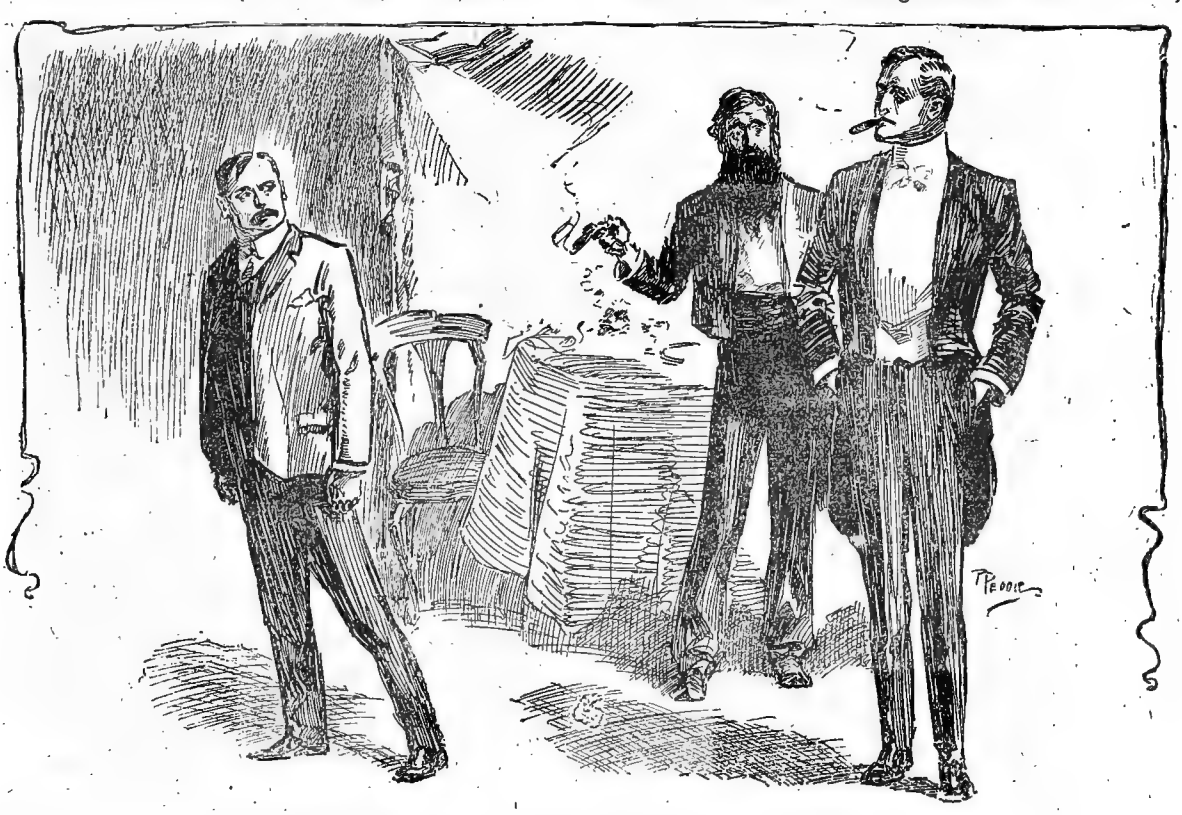
Herarra had been in a good many tight places during his criminal career, but this question would have put him into one of the tightest, had it not been that, save in the matter of life and death, the man who asked it was absolutely at his mercy. There was, therefore, not the slightest necessity to tell anything like the truth, and so he lied with a logical fluency which excited Ellerton's involuntary, but none the less sincere, admiration.

"Ah, now," he said, "you have finally convinced me that you have forgotten everything save perhaps your own identity. Of course, you are perfectly right in what you say and equally, of course, it is true that we came where we are by another road. But it would be idle to repeat all that old story now about the party of mining explorers who got themselves lost.

"That is merely commonplace, and I should be only wasting time by trying to describe what you have completely forgotten. Some day when you have got a little more at home again we will take an opportunity of re-discovering it together." ("That's not a bad sort of lie under the circumstances," thought Ellerton while Herarra was speaking, "but it won't go down, my friend. I don't know how you and I came down; but I'm perfectly certain we didn't come that way.")

"Quite so," he replied aloud, looking at the end of his cigar, "that will be a most interesting excursion when we make it, but I suppose there is no particular hurry. I had better renew my acquaintance with your Underworld first. And now, to change the subject for a moment," he went on, looking round the walls and up towards the ceiling at the lamps, or rather discs of light, which illuminated the chamber, "what light is that and where do you get it from. It doesn't look like either gas or electricity and it can hardly be oil."

"It is none of them," replied Herarra, thinking that he was answering a perfectly harmless question, "it is, as I will show you when you renew your acquaintance with our Underworld, one of the reasons which apparently enabled the descendants of the first discoverer of this region—a discovery which must, of course, have been purely accidental—to illuminate it and so by degrees recover their power of vision. We have very greatly improved the appliances of it but even we do not know exactly what it is. We have learnt to use it, as men first learned the use of electricity, without knowing what it was.



As Battley left the room Ellerton gave him a glance which meant a great deal.

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But that must wait now, I am afraid, for here is Brenda to tell us that dinner is ready."

As he spoke the curtains over the entrance parted and Brenda came between them. She looked at them for a moment with her big, shyly-shrinking eyes and said; as she crossed her hands and bowed her head:

"Master, our lady bids me tell you that the table is spread and waits your pleasure."

"Very good, we will come!" said Herarra in English and in a rough tone which inspired Ellerton with a desire to kick him. Then he continued in the same language, and with a perceptible Spanish accent: "Come, sir, dinner is ready. I hope that you will not find the hospitality of our Underworld, to which you have become such a stranger, deficient."

Ellerton got up and followed him through the curtains, one of which Brenda held aside for them to pass, and as he went by her, she raised her head and their eyes met for an instant.

There was a dim, half-expressed appeal in hers, which could not possibly have been translated into words, but which inspired him with a desire to strangle Herarra, which was a good deal stronger than his previous desire to kick him.

Still, there was no use in worrying about that sort of thing just then, and so he came to the wise conclusion that he had better think out these strange happenings a little longer.

Herarra led him to the left along the spacious corridors illuminated by the lamps, whose source of light was still puzzling to him, and turned to the right into another chamber something like the reception-room, smaller, but even more splendidly furnished and decorated.

It was an oval chamber hung with tapestries, which concealed the rough-hewn rock walls. The ceiling was draped with sky-blue silken hangings, which depended from the centre of the ceiling, and met the tapestries at what seemed to be the top of the walls in such fashion that the room presented the appearance of a great tent. From the centre of the roof depended a large ground glass globe, which lighted the whole with the same soft, diffused, mysterious radiance.

The table in the centre of the dining-room was oval, and, in common parlance, there were four covers laid. A fourth place was vacant, and Ellerton, remembering the manners of the Overworld, stood by the chair, which his hostess had asked him to take by a motion of her hand, looking at the vacant place and waiting for the fourth guest to make his appearance.

"We shall not keep you very long, I hope, Señor," said his hostess with a note of apology in her tone. "Mr. Battley is a little late, but perhaps that is because his duties have kept him beyond the time. Ah, yes, very little," she went on, still in Spanish, "here he is."

As Mr. Battley, a short, sturdy, dark-haired, blue-eyed, square-jawed Yorkshireman, came in through the curtains apologising in English for being a few moments late, Ellerton had thoughts running through his mind, which so forcibly summed up the situation, that they could hardly be reproduced in cold print.

The man looked at him for a moment, then his eyelids dropped, and with another bow to the Señora, he went to his seat. It took all Ellerton's self-control, and he had a good deal of it, not to show that he recognised in this man one of his father's best engineers who had stolen the specifications of an apparatus upon which he himself had been working hard for some months before this crisis, which had begun on board the *Isola*, and was being continued in this new existence of his.

He bowed as Herarra made the introduction, and said to him in Spanish:

"The Señor's name is English. May I ask whether he understands the language which we have spoken so far? I only ask the question, because it may be that the Señora does not understand our English speech—I mean mine and his. Of course I need not remind you that it is usual to use a language at the dinner-table that everyone understands."

"It is unfortunate," replied Herarra, "but our friend understands only English. I speak it with some little difficulty, and the Señora not at all, except just a few words, and so I suppose we shall have to make the best of it."

The Señora bowed her acquiescence, and Ellerton, looking straight at Battley, as though he were a perfect stranger, said:

"Very well, as I happen to speak both languages, perhaps we shall be able to get on."

"No doubt of that, I think," said the Señora. "May I ask, Señor, where you learnt your Spanish before you joined us so many years ago in this Underworld of ours?"

He saw an absolutely savage expression come over Herarra's face as she said this, but it vanished in a moment when he replied:

"You see, Señora, that I have been suffering from a serious lapse of memory, and therefore I am not quite able to answer that question exactly, but somehow it seems to me that a long time ago now I did learn to speak Spanish."

And while he was saying this he looked at Battley, saying in his soul:

"I am not sorry I met you, and if you don't help me out of this place, that I've tumbled into somehow, I'll wring your neck, whatever else happens."

The meal was such as might have been served in the Carlton or the Waldorf-Astoria, and the wine was certainly not made from grapes grown beyond the reach of the sun. These were facts which Ellerton laid by for possible future use. The conversation was somewhat restrained and difficult in consequence, not only of Mr. Battley's lack of Spanish, but also to a considerable extent on another account which he would have found it difficult to explain to the man at the head of the table, who already held his liberty in his hands, and, as he very well knew, could and would, if necessary, arrange for his disappearance from the ledge into the boiling lake, by just giving his orders.

When the dinner was over—and Ellerton was very glad when it was finished, chiefly because of his disgust at the slavish manner in which Brenda and Thyrza and Myra waited upon them, as though they were not even servants but slaves, Herarra said to him in Spanish, as the Señora rose:

"And now, Señor, shall we go back to your own apartment and smoke our cigars, or would you prefer to renew your old and forgotten memories of the world to which you have returned?"

"If we can smoke our cigars while I am renewing my memories I think I should prefer that," replied Ellerton, as he bowed his adieu to the Señora, "and our friend here, I presume he will accompany us? From our conversation I take it that he is your second-in-command," he continued, looking uncomfortably hard at the Yorkshireman.

"The Señor is the head of our engineering department," was the reply. "As he does not enjoy tobacco, and as he has some matters to attend to before the sleeping hour comes—you see we make our own night and day here—we will, if you please, take a sip of coffee and cognac, and join him later in his department."

Mr. Battley took his dismissal for the time thankfully. As he left the room Ellerton gave him a look which meant a great deal.

While they sipped their coffee almost in silence save for a few casual remarks, for, truth to tell, both were somewhat busy thinking, Ellerton took every opportunity that offered to look keenly at every feature and gesture of his host, what time the two words "Leon Herarra"—"Leon Herarra"—kept chasing each other through his mind. He knew the name well enough as that of the man who had forged the bonds; but the man himself, the man he had half-recognised when he woke for the first time—where had he *seen* him before?

Presently, as Herarra set down his empty cup, rose and said politely:

"Well, Señor, if you have finished, shall we go?" the flash of recollection came.

"Good God, I thought so! He was the other man in the boat, and I saved his life by getting this chop over the head from our mutual friend Staunton. What the dickens will happen if he recognises me?"

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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He Couldn't Afford it.

ESTELLE: "And are you going to leave me so soon, Augustus?" Augustus: "My love, I would willingly give ten years of my life if I could stay longer. But if I don't go, I shall be fined sixpence for being late at our debating society."

Then He Revoked.

"MY wife," he said proudly, "has been known as the queen of hearts." "No doubt," they answered; "it was because she took the knave."

An Ambiguous Farewell.

HE (about to start on a journey): "Can I still trust you to love me so when I am far away?" She (trustfully): "Yes dearest, yes. The farther you are away the better I shall love you!"

She Still Wonders.

"How long does the train stop here?" the old lady asked the guard. "Stop here?" answered the functionary. "Four minutes. From two to two to two-two." "I wonder," mused the old lady, "if that man thinks he is the whistle?"

That was No Encouragement.

HE: "If you did not love me, why did you encourage me?" She: "I haven't encouraged you." He: "For two seasons you have accepted every one of my invitations to the theatre." She: "That was not because I loved you; it was because I loved the theatre."

The Natural Reason.

"ETHEL," said a clergyman to one of his daughters, whom he saw with her hair in curling-pins, "if Nature had assigned your hair to curl, it would have curled it for you." "It did, dad, when I was a child," was the reply; "but I suppose it thinks now that I am old enough to do it myself."

It Came as a Shock.

SOPHY (who has accepted Mr. Charles Fleetwood the night before): "Does Mr. Fleetwood strike you as being a sensitive man, Pauline?" Pauline (who doesn't know of the engagement): "Gracious, no! A man who has been rejected by fourteen girls within six months, and gets fat on it, cannot be sensitive. Why, Sophy! what's the matter?" She had fainted.

Feminine Figures.

"No," said the beauteous maiden, "I cannot marry you; the disparity in our ages is an insurmountable barrier." "But," answered the man who would a hubby be, "you admit to having celebrated twenty-two birthday anniversaries, and I am only ten years your senior." "True," said the fair one, "but think of the difference twenty years hence; you will be fifty-two and I will be twenty-seven." And, being a wise man, he said never a word, but let it go at that.

She Asked for it and She Got it.

HE: "A funny thing happened up at the Blimbers the other night. May Blimber, you know, is quite a whistler, and she walked up to the piano, and sat down, and was just going to whistle her best piece——" She: "Yes; go on." He: "Charlie Linseed was there, and he didn't know about her whistling talent. And so when she looked up at him with her mouth all puckered he thought it was an invitation and kissed her." She: "Did he? Was—was it puckered like this?"

A Profound Secret.

SOPHIE: "Julie and Joe are engaged, but they have decided to keep their engagement a secret; Julie told me so." Tom: "Yes; I know it; Joe told me."

What He Did and where She was.

LAWYER: "Where did he kiss you?" Pretty Plaintiff: "On the mouth, sir." Lawyer: "No, no! you don't understand. I mean where were you?" Plaintiff (blushing): "In his arms, sir."

Two Points of View.

HE: "Your eyes remind me of a bottle of champagne." She: "And why, pray?" He: "Because they sparkle so." She: "Well, you remind me of the empty bottle." He: "How so?" She: "You don't pop."

All the Difference.

MAUDE: "Oh, mamma, I wish you'd introduce me to that tall gentleman yonder. He has such a noble carriage!" Mamma: "Don't be foolish, dear; he's a nobody. But the little gentleman with him has a noble carriage and pair!"

A Romance Ended.

WATTS: "There are two broken-hearted chappies in two office buildings down my way." Potts: "And why?" Watts: "They have been flirting with each other across the street for a week from their window. Each thought the other was a girl."

Bridegrooms as Bargains.

"WAS she willing to pay so much for such an insignificant husband?" asked the thoughtless girl. "Oh, dear no," replied the well-posted girl, "she was buying a position in Society when she took the duke, and not a husband. He was simply done up in the package."

The Mistake They Made.

"WHEN I was courting my wife," said the sad-faced man, "we were two souls with but a single thought." "How about you at present?" asked the inquisitive youth. "We still have a single thought," replied the proprietor of the sad visage. "We both think we made idiots of ourselves."

He who Hesitates is Lost.

"Is it true, Miss Gertie," he said, "that there are just two things a woman will jump at—a conclusion and a mouse?" "No," she answered, "there is a third, Mr. Philip." After thinking the matter over for a few minutes he tremblingly made her an offer, but she didn't jump at it. He was not the right man.

It Had the Desired Effect.

HE was one of those bashful young men, and sat six yards away from the girl of his choice. "Don't you think you'd better see a surgeon, Freddy?" she inquired with feigned alarm. "See a surgeon, D—Dolly!" he echoed, in astonishment. "Why, what for?" "Really, didn't you know your arm was out of place?" Then those six yawning yards were diminished.

A Very Remote Ancestor.

MRS. NEWRICHE (patronisingly): "Were any of your ancestors men of note, Mr. Cynic?" Mr. Cynic: "Yes, madam, I should say so. One of them was the most famous admiral of his day, and commanded the allied forces of the world." Mrs. Newriche (with altered tone of deep respect): "Is it possible, Mr. Cynic? And what was his name?" Mr. Cynic: "Noah, madam."

She was a Clever Girl.

THE critical minute had come. He knelt on the carpet. "Darling," he whispered, "will you be my wife?" Just then a deep voice from a corner answered, "Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes!" a dozen times. "What does that mean?" gasped the astonished suitor. "It means," replied the fair girl, "that papa forbade me answering in the affirmative when you proposed. However, this did not deter me from employing a phonograph to take my place."

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Mrs. McLaren's Boarder.

Relating the Mistake a Girl Made.

Not that she had only one; no, she had many. I was one, my Uncle Dick was another; but the lodger whom I have in my mind's eye in connection with the title of my tale was a gentleman, young and handsome, whose advent created a stir in my serenity.

One afternoon, while I was gazing out of my window, I beheld a large van pulling up before the door, laden with seven large trunks, a capacious clothes-basket with a cover, a bundle of swords and canes, and several hat-boxes.

These articles were all safely deposited within the house. Surely, I thought, not all the property of the one masculine whom I knew our worthy landlady was expecting to occupy the room next my own (third storey front); but I was much mistaken; the entire collection of miscellaneous luggage was before long imported to the neighbouring apartment, much—very much—to my astonishment; but I, of course, forbore either to make remarks or ask questions.

At dinner I beheld the proprietor of all this array, good-looking, as I remarked above, tall, his finely-developed figure displayed to admirable advantage in a grey tweed suit; dark-brown eyes, and beautiful white teeth, showing, now and then, under his thick moustache.

Immediately my interest and curiosity were aroused in the newcomer. I had no chance to view him other than in the brief dinner hour, for, immediately thereafter, donning a shining top hat, and toying with an ivory-handled cane, Mr. Duane lit a cigar and sauntered forth.

Late at night I heard him return and enter his room. His customs were strange, I thought, at first; he appeared very late in the mornings for breakfast, walked forth at about half-past ten or eleven, usually armed not only with cane and cigar, but also a light roll, either manuscript or pamphlets, I could not determine which. He always came home about three, but regularly passed his evenings out. Now and then a mysterious boy appeared, and bore off the clothes-basket, apparently bursting and running over with parti-coloured wearing apparel, and occasionally the point of a rapier gave zest to the arrangement. The basket was, however, always returned by the same boy, sometimes full, sometimes empty.

The occupations of Mr. Duane, while at home, I could vouch for as being studious. He seemed to devote his entire muscle and lung to elocutionary exercise; and the nature of his selections roamed anywhere from Shakespeare down to nameless authors of the nineteenth century.

I finally concluded, after an argument with Uncle Dick, that he was a young lawyer, or rather that he hoped and aspired to fame in the practice of the law.

After expressing this belief to Mrs. McLaren, she coincided with me entirely, adding that he "was of a very fine old family in Lancashire—very fine; and, oh, yes, of course, a-studying for the Bar!"

The mystery was solved — at least the mystery of elocutionary exercise at any and every hour of the day and night; but the boy, the seven trunks, the parti-coloured garments, and the collection of fire and side-arms!"

Wait and hope! I should yet find out. Certainly, he was marvellously fine-looking, and I could readily comprehend his being a scion of an aristocratic house, for he had a very thoroughbred air.

Once Mr. Duane was lured into the drawing-room. It was on a Sunday evening, which was, in point of fact, the only night that he ever spent in the house, no matter what the elements or the attractions within doors.

He was invited to sing by a maiden of certain years, and replied somewhat strangely, I thought, that "he'd never learnt; that sort of thing never came in his line at all, and——" At which point Mrs. McLaren hastily called the young aspirant for legal honours to her side to look at photographs of departed McLarens.

What it all denoted I was at a loss to conjecture, but upon one subject I was positive, and that was an unconquerable curiosity in my neighbour.

Daily, as I watched him go forth with his little porfolio, a bundle of yellowish-brown pamphlets, I yearned to know more of him; it was irresistible; fight as I would against it, I took a frightful interest in this new boarder, who, beyond a steady habit he had of looking at me fixedly, now and then, and blushing like a girl whenever I caught the turn of his eyes, evidently took no interest in me; we never talked to each other, scarcely spoke, only a polite profound bow, whenever I chanced to meet him, as I occasionally did in the street, swinging along in his lazy fashion.

But, notwithstanding his lack of interest in me, mine grew wilfully and wonderfully strong in him, and refused to be crushed, either by other society or those rules of propriety for the guidance of a young maiden's heart and thoughts which my dear old uncle, aided and abetted by my worthy and spinster aunt, Matilda, had instilled into my breast since earliest childhood.

I *would* think of young lawyers, and brown eyes, and seven trunks, and an adherence to one grey tweed suit, whether it was proper, or whether it was not.

One day, in about the middle of the eighth week of this object of interest's residence in the boarding-house, I was lying prone upon my sofa, afflicted with the most frightful headache.

The door was standing partially open, in such a way that I could see out, but no person passing see in, for the heat from the hot water pipes with which the room was heated almost suffocated me, and I feared an incursion of neuralgia from without should I open the window.

There came a ring at the bell—no unusual sound, but I noticed it, because every small sound almost drove me distracted.

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The ring was repeated with violence several times, and presently I discerned a clear, correct feminine voice inquire, "Is Mr. Duane at home?"

Upon receiving an affirmative reply, and the attendant question, "What name?" this woman's clear voice replied: "Miss Delaplaine; but, never mind; what room?—third floor front, I believe, isn't it?" she asked briskly. "I'll go straight up; you needn't trouble," with which comforting assurance to Bridget's weary limbs, Miss Delaplaine, with a sprightly step, bounded up the stairs and presently brushed past my door on her way.

She was a tall, dark, pretty girl, with a great many curls floating down her back, a little pink hat sat jauntily on her head, a perfectly irreproachable grey silk dress, an ungloved dress, with a variety of rings and a roll of something in it.

Upon reaching my neighbour's door, she tapped lightly, and receiving an invitation from the other side to "come in," turned the knob, and sang out:

"Hello, Mr. Duane! how are you? I got so fidgety over this hateful thing, I thought I must go over it once again with you before to-night, so——"

Here Miss Delaplaine's speech was cut short by her host's voice, which I could hear distinctly enough through the thin partition dividing the apartments.

"Don't bawl so, Lillie, for Heaven's sake! Shut the door, can't you?"

The portal banged, whether urged thereto by host or guest I could not say, but it might as well have been open so far as I was concerned. Firstly, I heard Mr. Duane's voice in a very slow, drawling sort of tone:

"I haven't looked at the thing yet. I've been so busy about other matters."

"Not looked at it!" responded Miss Delaplaine, in accents of surprise. "Why, you'll be sure to break down, and if you do I'll never forgive you, or get over it, either. You know the whole business is new to me, anyway, and I don't see how you can act so meanly, Harold!"

Miss Delaplaine spoke in a key that was piteous to hear. Her host replied languidly:

"Oh, I'm an awfully quick study. Don't worry, please. Just sit down there and amuse yourself for a few minutes while I get ready; that's a darling," added Mr. Duane, in a soft manner.

This brief dialogue was succeeded by a silence of a quarter of an hour or so.

"What could it mean?" I asked myself again and again. "Engaged? But even so, how strange to come and visit her betrothed in so social and peculiar a style? Cousins? I never visited my cousins of the opposite gender in their boarding-houses, nor did any of my acquaintances. Simpy a friend? Well, no; further off than ever. "'That's a darling!'" rang in my ears like a sort of knell. "Engaged," I repeated to myself, "of course; but how very odd! I should not think Mr. Harold Duane the sort of man who would fancy such a fiery, free-and-easy young lady to convert into his wife; but there's no telling," I argued. "She certainly is a trifle fast, but then she is very pretty, and probably very worthy and lovely."

My explanatory soliloquy with reference to Miss Lillie Delaplaine was here interrupted by that young lady's soprano voice carolling melodiously a couplet of some song relating to "my love" and "stars," and "wars."

This display of her quantity of lung power was hastily put a stop to by him whom I now forced myself to consider the vocalist's intended husband, in these terms:

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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"Oh, stop that squalling! You'll rouse the house. There!" and I heard a bang upon the table. "That's fine, my dear."

"Get up," replied Miss Lillie irrelevantly.

"What, 'biz' and all?" inquired her host, in somewhat of a languid tone. "I am very tired."

"Of course; that was principally what I got in the fidgets over. Come. Oh, Colonel, is that you?"

Mr. Duane's affianced spoke in tones of accentuated and silvery surprise, and I waited eagerly for the response of some individual who, I thought, must have entered the next room through the medium of the window, or else rendered himself invisible while passing my door. But no third voice made itself heard. Mr. Duane's own organ answered in tones of delicious gallantry:

"'Tis I, Mademoiselle Estelle; and how beautiful, how charming, you look! Why do you wander in this wild and unfrequented region, where you are exposed to——"

A scream from Miss Lillie Estelle (I presume the latter to be a middle name), smothered by some means by Mr. Duane interrupted this speech. A terrific bang against the wall, either one of the two falling upon the floor with a resounding crash—Miss Lillie Estelle, I surmise, from what succeeds—Mr., or rather, Colonel, Duane's voice betokening a terrible anguish of spirit as he spoke.

"My beloved! Look up and speak to me, Estelle; he is dead! You now have not an enemy upon the earth, nor I a rival or an opponent. Look upon me, beloved, with those beautiful eyes, and say that you will live for me!"

Decidedly this was growing peculiar. Ought I to have heard! Ought I not get up and make a racket, or leave my room altogether? No, I could not; my head throbbed wildly, and I could not help hearing; if Mr. Duane chose to go through such scenes with his *fiancée*, he might; I should not move.

This train of thought was interrupted by a low moan from the young lady; and, fed by reflection and a vigorous fancy, I rapidly concluded that the "colonel," although a mute, was probably Miss Delaplaine's guardian, and had eluded my observation in gaining the next room, and in attempting to coerce his ward into a final separation from her lover, had met with an untimely end at the hands of her disapproved suitor.

But how account for the strange language they had used in conversing—the peculiar allusions to "wild and unfrequented regions?"

Alas! I was fearfully bewildered, and almost feared I had suddenly gone insane. However, whether insane or not, the sense of hearing, or its perverted semblance, was still mine. The low moan over, Mr. Duane exclaimed, in tones of horror:

"Behold him dead, and by this hand—for thee!"

Again a moan and a brief silence, which I occupied in picturing the body, which I was now sure was lying stiff and stark in the next room, and of the accuracy of my instinctive abhorrence for the collection of arms I had noted in the strange boarder's luggage.

Murder! I thought my brain fairly reeling. Murder! It must have been with a poinard, or a dirk. I had heard no report, and the "colonel" had never spoken a word. Of course I ought—I must get up and alarm the house; but my limbs refused to support me. A dim and terrible fear possessed my soul, and I lay still upon the lounge, petrified with horror.

Presently I again distinguished sounds issuing from the fatal apartment, indistinct at first, but finally clearer. Quite clearly Miss Lillie Estelle Delaplaine's voice sounded out lively and cheerful.

"I say, Harold, think I'll look well in a wedding-dress?"

"Suppose so," said the other laconically. "Don't daub your face up with too much paint, though; and, look here, Lil, don't lean too heavily on me, because I haven't got over that brilliant tumble of mine from the flies yet. It hurts like the dickens every day."

"All right," sang out the lively Lillie. "Come on; now for the next. That's light; you might as well sit down, if you like. You do look tired, Harold. I do declare, you look as though you were in love with somebody. Who is it? Quite romantic. You aren't nearly as lively as when you first came down from Lancashire."

My heavens! I saw it all. They were going to be married that night. In the very presence of the body of the murdered colonel, this girl had the coolness to ask him how he thought "she'd look in her wedding-dress?"

And he! What must he be? A man certainly could not *love* the girl whom, about to marry, he advised in a careless voice not to "paint her face too much," and not to "lean upon his arm too heavily."

What should I do?

There were more low murmurings, probably, I judged, relative to the disposition of the body of the murdered man, and then Miss Lillie Estelle's voice, quivering with a passionate tenderness, ejaculated:

"Swear to me that I am your first and only love!"

"Oh, no," rang out Mr. Duane's clear, sweet voice, adding, with a low, rippling laugh, "not by many!"

I could stand this no longer. I rose by a tremendous effort, slammed my door, locked it with trembling fingers, and flew to open the window for a breath of air, and sank down upon my knees, gaining a little strength and relief from the fresh November breeze.

In less than ten minutes I beheld Miss Delaplaine emerge from the house. She glanced up at the window of her intended husband's room, kissed her hand playfully, sang out in a melodious little voice:

"Ta-ta; be round at seven, sharp;" and shaking her silken skirts airily, the future Mrs. Duane was soon lost

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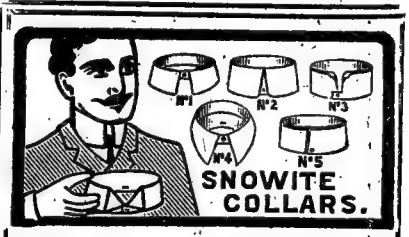

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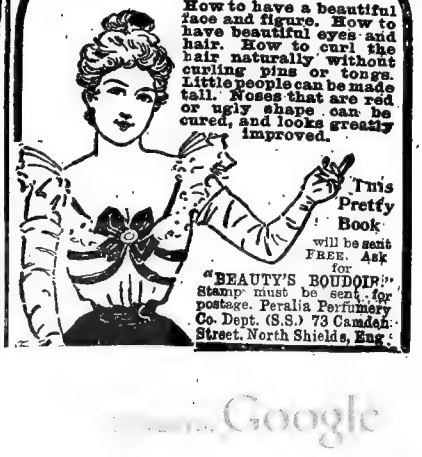

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to view round the corner of Clarence Street, presently succeeded by Mr. Duane, who, however, meandered in the opposite direction.

Revived by the cool air, I rose and hastily unbolted the door, preparatory to going below to announce the tragedy to Mrs. McLaren, and to declare to her at one and the same time that no human power would induce me to sleep another night in the third storey of her house. My uncle, of course, had not as yet returned from his business, so I could not rush to him first.

Opening the door, I peeped cautiously out. Horrors! Mr. Duane's door stood wide open, and almost unconsciously I gazed in, expecting to behold, with frozen eyes, the "colonel's" body laid out upon a blood-stained carpet.

Nothing of the sort. No "colonel," no body, no blood; nothing at all different from the usual aspect my neighbour's apartment presented to my daily vision as I passed in and out.

What had they done with it? Had they put it up the chimney? There was none. In the cupboard? No; the door of that receptacle stood open, and within it, as sole occupants, were a light overcoat, a Panama hat, and three or four pairs of boots.

I stood there speechless, glaring, in a white wrapper and long, dishevelled hair, when I heard a footstep, and in another instant the murderer stood before me.

In rather a gasping voice I ejaculated, somewhat unnecessarily:

"I thought—you were out, Mr. Duane!" and then bitterly regretted having spoken at all.

What business had I thinking anything about him, in or out, the wretched criminal?

"I did step out to get a cigar," he replied, smiling. "Is there anything I can do for you?" he replied civilly. "You look alarmed."

"I am, for I—I thought you'd been killing somebody!"

It was a wild thing to say to a man with whom one had never exchanged a hundred words, and who, in all murderous probability, would thank you harshly for your information; but he received it obligingly enough, as he laughed, and answered:

"Oh, I'm sorry we disturbed you. Miss Delaplaine, our leading lady, is rather lively, even over her rehearsals. I did my best to keep her quiet, for I was afraid all the while that we were annoying you. Please forgive me?" he asked, bending two repentant brown eyes upon me. "I—she sha'n't come here again for any new piece."

"Oh, certainly," I responded, in a maze of bewilderment, and with the best grace I could command. "Please forgive me my rudeness and my frightful suspicions. I really thought you had been murdering a colonel or somebody!"

He laughed heartily, and with a hundred assurances of future good behaviour, and the brightest, sweetest smile in the world under his golden moustache, disappeared within the recesses of the apartment for which he paid the worthy Mrs. McLaren thirty shillings per week.

I flew to my landlady, not with a tale of crime, but for information.

"An actor," she said.

Ah, now I saw it all! but why had she never divulged the nature of her new boarder's calling, but rather induced the belief in another calling. He, as I remembered now, had never evinced any disposition to make a secret of his belonging to the "profession."

Well, Mrs. McLaren explained, now that she had to, that when the supposed law-student engaged the room, she knew not his occupation. A few days later she became acquainted with it, and yet feared to let her other boarders into the secret, knowing full well that their virtuous and well-regulated souls would recoil from the idea of a play-actor beneath the same roof with themselves. All of them were people who would as soon think of entering a theatre as undertaking a trip to America in a paper boat. Mr. Duane's thirty shillings a week were dear to the heart of the widow McLaren, and, besides, he was "such a gentleman! such a fine family! such exceptional references, that she hadn't the heart to tell him she required the room."

An actor! This, then, explained days at home and nights abroad; collections of fire and side-arms, wigs, and last—by no means least—Miss Lillie (without the Estelle this time) Delaplaine's call.

The seven trunks, of course, contained his wardrobe—theatrical, not civilian. The visits of the mysterious boy were simply occasions for carrying forth those costumes required by Mr. Duane in the play then running, and to return those not in use. The morning promenades, armed with pamphlets (alas! containing "parts," not "briefs"), simply eleven o'clock calls to rehearsal. Strange that no one ever saw his name in the papers, or his face behind the footlights. But, dear me, he was, of course, no star, and then the name.

Well, the new boarder, Mr. Harold Duane, was a law-student, and any other Mr. Harold Duane announced as fulfilling the *role* of hero in drama, comedy, or farce, could certainly not be connected with him.

Again, none of the virtuous dwellers beneath the roof of Mrs. McLaren ever darkened the door of a temple of the drama with their presence.

Of course, now that the secret was out, all attempts at legal dissimulation on the part of the worthy widow were at an end.

That evening, when the subject of their discussion was probably repeating his love-making of the morning to "Mademoiselle Estelle," the anti-histrionic corps of his fellow-boarders were holding solemn conclave over the horrors of the situation in the parlour.

Though present, I was not of their inclination. I had always adored in secret that profession of which the sometime law-student was a member; but the result of this court of investigation was that, either Mr. Duane must leave, or they, the judges, would; one of the two—whichever seemed better to the mind of Mrs. McLaren.

As may readily be imagined, the arithmetical problem of a weekly deficit in the receipts of thirty shillings, or ten or twelve times that sum, was quickly solved in the brain of the widow.

The next morning the dramatic and hitherto mysterious boarder was duly informed of the perils and necessities of the situation.

Poor fellow! he had fully believed all along that everyone was perfectly aware of his business, and seemed to be rather confounded at the whole proceeding.

However, he appeared quite regardless of the tribulations of moving, and watched (I did, too, from the vantage-ground of my casement) the loading of the seven trunks with a becoming calm.

But, if the virtuous dozen were in danger while Mr. Duane, whilom lawyer, present actor, slept beneath the same roof with them, they were not very much better off when he dreamt his dreams out, six streets away.

Mr. Duane got a trick of coming round frightfully often, and, after a while, nearly every day; and finally—we've laughed a great many times together over his "engagement," engendered in my fertile imagination, with Miss Lillie Delaplaine, who, it seems, is married.

"No intention in the world of running away with Lillie," said Harold to me, the other day; "but I hope I shall tell you very soon, Muriel, my little darling, how you look in a wedding-dress."

Katie Birrell.

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a great deal which it will be useful for you to know. What sort of a disposition you have, whether you are likely to succeed in life, if you are of an affectionate and lovable nature, besides much other information without which you would probably be hopelessly at sea in the affairs of every-day life. You can obtain a reliable delineation of your character by sending a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped, addressed envelope, to RANEE, 23 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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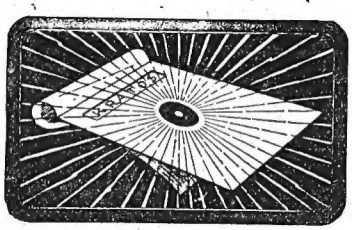

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Suspicion.

"I AM anxious about my lover," writes "AMY." "He has recently changed his lodgings, and his landlady's daughter is a very pretty girl, who will see a lot of him. I am living some distance away, and fear he may be stolen from me."

* * * * * * * *

I should trust him, "AMY." Surely he is not so fickle as to be led away so easily? And if you let the young lady know that he is your sweetheart, I feel sure she will not be so mean as to attempt to steal him from you. After all, a pretty girl is not so hard up for suitors that she must poach on other people's preserves to find one.

Should He Propose?

"ADOLPHUS" writes, "I wish to become engaged to a certain girl, but not until my means allow. I expect shortly to inherit a sum of money, which would enable me to offer her marriage, but there is just a doubt. Would you advise me to postpone proposal until I know definitely, or until I come into the money, or what should I do?"

* * * * * * * *

It would be better to be candid with the girl, and tell her your prospects. I do not suppose she herself will wish to become engaged unless you have good means or assured prospects, and would probably take as sensible a view of your not proposing as you could wish. It is certainly wise not to pledge yourself and the girl until you know you are in a position to make her happy.

Unconscious Offence.

"I AM afraid," writes "B. T.," "that I have offended a young lady to whom I wished to pay attentions, but only know of it through private sources. The other night I made some trivial remark, which I meant as a joke, but I thought she took it seriously. She did not appear offended at the time, but later on I met a great friend of hers, who said, 'Miss B—— is offended with you for saying what you did, but don't let her know I told you so, as I only heard it in strict confidence.' What am I to do? I cannot apologise, as I am not supposed to know she is offended."

* * * * * * * *

If you really said something you should not, it would be better in any case to apologise, and explain your meaning. You need not reveal that you heard it from the friend. Write saying you regretted afterwards what you had said, and hoped it would be overlooked. It may take some time to right it, as you must know that slight offences are less soon forgiven than heavy ones.

A Too Long Engagement.

"ENGAGED" writes: "When I proposed to my young lady she was twenty-five years old, and quite attractive in looks and manner. Three years have now elapsed, and though I'm still fond of her, she has gone off a great deal, and is a trifle peevish at times. I doubt whether, after all, we should really be happy now, as she seems so different. What would you advise?"

* * * * * * * *

I advise you to marry her at the earliest possible moment. A man who lets an engagement hang on indefinitely—if, of course, he is able to marry—can scarcely be surprised if his sweetheart shows some signs of advancing years. I doubt not that the girl is chafing at the length of the engagement, and wishes to get married. At twenty-eight, though still young, a girl feels she should not still be single, and no doubt her dear friends remind her of the fact. These things combine to sour her manner, and wear her looks, and it is her *fiancé's* duty to hasten on the wedding.

Fear of a Mother-in-Law.

"I AM not happy," writes "EDWARD." "I am very fond of the girl to whom I am engaged, but cannot endure her mother. I fear we should not at all agree after married life. Do you think it would be wise to go further with the affair, seeing how unhappy the mother-in-law may make us."

* * * * * * * *

One would think, "EDWARD," that you were going to marry the mother-in-law yourself from your anxiety. I have never heard of an engagement being broken off for such a reason, and do not think you can be very fond of the girl if you ever contemplate a breach on those grounds. Besides, there is no need for you to entertain your mother-in-law after marriage. It is quite a delusion and very old-fashioned to make out that this lady is sure to interfere in her son-in-law's household. Most of the mothers-in-law of my acquaintance, though ever so fond of their sons and daughters, leave them severely alone in their private affairs. It is only a very foolish and vulgar type of person who interferes in this way, and I think she lives chiefly in the imagination.

Advice for a Mother.

HERE is another mother question, and a rather more serious one. "MATER'S" daughter is a very sensitive, innocent girl, who is receiving attentions from a man much older than herself, who has not a very good character. Still, he has much influence over the girl. "MATER" wants to stop the affair altogether, but fears it would make her daughter unhappy. What is the best thing to do?

* * * * * * * *

If the man has no serious intentions, and is not a fit person for your daughter to marry, you ought to stop any communication. It may go against the grain, perhaps, to be too strict, but it is your duty as a mother to do it. Be careful not to do it in a tyrannical way, which might lead to an elopement or secret marriage between the couple. It would be better if you could take the girl away for a long stay, or send her somewhere where she would not be in touch with the man. You should also privately talk to him, to see what he intends, and if you still think the affair is unsatisfactory, ask him to cease meeting your daughter. She might be unhappy for a while, but I feel sure she will soon get over it when she sees that you have acted for the best.

Cynthia

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5. *Which is your favourite book, and why?*
6. *When was King Edward VII. born. Give year and day?*

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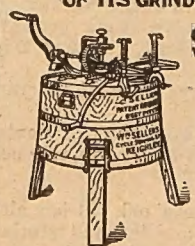

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